THE SKIN GAME

JOHN GALSWORTHY

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THE SKIN GAME

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A TRAGI-COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

JOHN GALSWORTHY

"Who touches pitch shall be defiled"

LONDON
DUCKWORTH AND CO.
HENRIETTA ST. COVENT GARDEN

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CHARACTERS

HILLCRIST	A Country Gentleman
AMY	His Wife
JILL	His Daughter
DAWKER	His Agent
HORNBLOWER	A man newly-rich
CHARLES	His Elder Son
CHLOE	Wife to Charles
ROLF	His Younger Son
FELLOWS	Hillcrist's Butler
ANNA	Chloe's Maid
THE JACKMANS	Man and Wife

AN AUCTIONEER

A SOLICITOR

TWO STRANGERS

ACT I. HILLCRIST'S *Study.*

ACT II.

SCENE I. A month later. An Auction Room.

SCENE II. The same evening. CHLOE'S *Boudoir.*

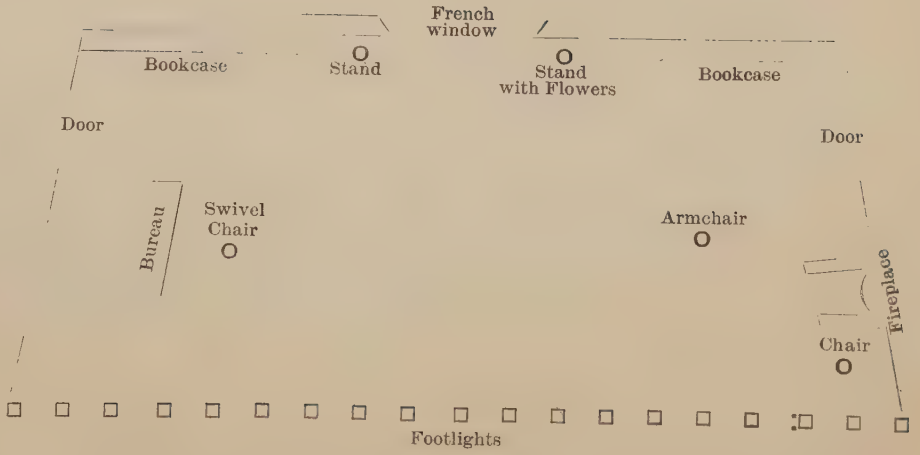
ACT III.

SCENE I. The following day. HILLCRIST'S *Study. Morning.*

SCENE II. The Same. Evening.

ACT I

ACT I


French window
Bookcase
Stand
Stand with Flowers
Bookcase
Door
Door
Bureau
Swivel Chair
Armchair
Fireplace
Chair
Footlights

ACT I

HILLCRIST'S *study. A pleasant room, with books in calf bindings, and signs that the* HILLCRISTS *have travelled, such as a large photograph of the Taj Mahal, of Table Mountain, and the Pyramids of Egypt. A large bureau* [*stage Right*], *devoted to the business of a country estate. Two foxes' masks. Flowers in bowls. Deep armchairs. A large French window open* [*at Back,*] *with a lovely view of a slight rise of fields and trees in August sunlight. A fine stone fireplace* [*stage Left*]. *A door* [*Left*]. *A door opposite* [*Right*]. *General colour effect—stone, and cigar-leaf brown, with spots of bright colour.*

[HILLCRIST *sits in a swivel chair at the bureau, busy with papers. He has gout, and his left foot is encased accordingly. He is a thin, dried-up man of about fifty-five, with a rather refined, rather kindly, and rather cranky countenance. Close to him stands his very upstanding nineteen-year-old daughter* JILL, *with clubbed hair round a pretty, manly face.*]

JILL. You know, Dodo, it's all pretty good rot in these days.

HILLCRIST. Cads are cads, Jill, even in these days.

JILL. What is a cad ?

HILLCRIST. A self-assertive fellow, without a sense of other people.

JILL. Well, Old Hornblower I'll give you.

HILLCRIST. I wouldn't take him.

JILL. Well, you've got him. Now, Charlie—Chearlie—I say—the importance of not being Charlie——

HILLCRIST. Good heavens ! do you know their Christian names ?

JILL. My dear father, they've been here seven years.

HILLCRIST. In old days we only knew their Christian names from their tombstones.

JILL. Charlie Hornblower isn't really half a bad sport.

HILLCRIST. About a quarter of a bad sport—I've always thought out hunting.

JILL. [*Pulling his hair*] Now, his wife—Chloe——

HILLCRIST. [*Whimsical*] Gad ! your mother'd have a fit if she knew you called her Chloe.

JILL. It's a ripping name.

HILLCRIST. Chloe ! H'm ! I had a spaniel once——

JILL. Dodo, you're narrow. Buck up, old darling, it won't do. Chloe has seen life, I'm pretty sure ; *that's* attractive, anyway. No, mother's not in the room ; don't turn your uneasy eyes.

HILLCRIST. Really, my dear, you are getting——

JILL. The limit Now, Rolf——

HILLCRIST. What's Rolf ? Another dog ?

JILL. Rolf Hornblower's a topper; he really is a nice boy.

HILLCRIST. [*With a sharp look*] Oh! He's a nice boy?

JILL. Yes, darling. You know what a nice boy is, don't you?

HILLCRIST. Not in these days.

JILL. Well, I'll tell you. In the first place, he's not amorous——

HILLCRIST. What! Well, that's some comfort.

JILL. Just a jolly good companion.

HILLCRIST. To whom?

JILL. Well, to anyone—me.

HILLCRIST. Where?

JILL. Anywhere. You don't suppose I confine myself to the home paddocks, do you? I'm naturally rangey, Father.

HILLCRIST. [*Ironically*] You don't say so!

JILL. In the second place, he doesn't like discipline.

HILLCRIST. Jupiter! He does seem attractive.

JILL. In the third place, he bars his father.

HILLCRIST. Is that essential to nice *girls* too?

JILL. [*With a twirl of his hair*] Fish not! Fourthly, he's got ideas.

HILLCRIST. I knew it!

JILL. For instance, he thinks—as I do——

HILLCRIST. Ah! *Good* ideas.

JILL. [*Pulling gently*] Careful! He thinks old people run the show too much. He says they oughtn't to, because they're so damtouchy. Are you damtouchy, darling?

HILLCRIST. Well, I'm—! I don't know about touchy.

JILL. He says there'll be no world fit to live in till we get rid of the old. We must make them climb a tall tree, and shake them off it.

HILLCRIST. [*Drily*] Oh! he says that!

JILL. Otherwise, with the way they stand on each other's rights, they'll spoil the garden for the young.

HILLCRIST. Does his father agree?

JILL. Oh! Rolf doesn't talk to *him*, his mouth's too large. Have you ever seen it, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Of course.

JILL. It's considerable, isn't it? Now yours is—reticent, darling. [*Rumpling his hair.*]

HILLCRIST. It won't be in a minute. Do you realise that I've got gout?

JILL. Poor ducky! How long have we been here, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Since Elizabeth, anyway.

JILL. [*Looking at his foot*] It has its drawbacks. D'you think Hornblower had a father? I believe he was spontaneous. But, Dodo, why all this—this *attitude* to the Hornblowers?

She purses her lips and makes a gesture as of pushing persons away.

HILLCRIST. Because they're pushing.

JILL. That's only because we *are*, as mother would say, and they're *not*—yet. But why not let them be?

HILLCRIST. You can't.

JILL. *Why?*

HILLCRIST. It takes generations to learn to live and let live, Jill. People like that take an ell when you give them an inch.

JILL. But if you gave them the ell, they wouldn't want the inch. Why should it all be such a skin game?

HILLCRIST. Skin game? Where *do* you get your lingo?

JILL. Keep to the point, Dodo.

HILLCRIST. Well, Jill, all life's a struggle between people at different stages of development, in different positions, with different amounts of social influence and property. And the only thing is to have rules of the game and keep them. New people like the Hornblowers haven't learnt those rules; *their* only rule is to get all they can.

JILL. Darling, don't prose. They're not half as bad as you think.

HILLCRIST. Well, when I sold Hornblower Longmeadow and the cottages, I certainly found him all right. All the same, he's got the cloven hoof. [*Warming up*] His influence in Deepwater is thoroughly bad; those potteries of his are demoralising—the whole atmosphere of the place is changing. It was a thousand pities he ever came here and discovered that clay. He's brought in the modern cut-throat spirit.

JILL. Cut *our* throat spirit, you mean. What's your definition of a gentleman, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. [*Uneasily*] Can't describe—only feel it.

JILL. Oh! Try!

HILLCRIST. Well—er—I suppose you might say—

a man who keeps his form and doesn't let life scupper him out of his standards.

JILL. But suppose his standards are low ?

HILLCRIST. [*With some earnestness*] I assume, of course, that he's honest and tolerant, gentle to the weak, and not self-seeking.

JILL. Ah ! self-seeking ? But aren't we all, Dodo ? *I* am.

HILLCRIST. [*With a smile*] You !

JILL. [*Scornfully*] Oh ! yes—too young to know.

HILLCRIST. Nobody knows till they're under pretty heavy fire, Jill.

JILL. Except, of course, mother.

HILLCRIST. How do you mean—mother ?

JILL. Mother reminds me of England according to herself—always right whatever she does.

HILLCRIST. Ye-es. Your mother *is* perhaps—the perfect woman——

JILL. That's what I was saying. Now, no one could call *you* perfect, Dodo. Besides, you've got gout.

HILLCRIST. Yes ; and I want Fellows. Ring that bell.

JILL. [*Crossing to the bell*] Shall I tell you *my* definition of a gentleman ? A man who gives the Hornblower his due. [*She rings the bell*] And I think mother ought to call on them. Rolf says old Hornblower resents it fearfully that she's never made a sign to Chloe the three years she's been here.

HILLCRIST. I don't interfere with your mother in such matters. She may go and call on the devil himself if she likes.

JILL. I know you're ever so much better than she is.

HILLCRIST. That's respectful.

JILL. You do keep your prejudices out of your phiz. But mother literally looks down her nose. And she never forgives an "h." They'd get the "hell" from her if they took the "hinch."

HILLCRIST. Jill—your language!

JILL. Don't slime out of it, Dodo. I say, mother ought to call on the Hornblowers.

No answer.

Well?

HILLCRIST. My dear, I always let people have the last word. It makes them—feel funny. Ugh! My foot!

Enter FELLOWS, *Left.*

Fellows, send into the village and get another bottle of this stuff.

JILL. I'll go, darling.

She blows him a kiss, and goes out at the window.

HILLCRIST. And tell cook I've got to go on slops. This foot's worse.

FELLOWS. [*Sympathetic*] Indeed, sir.

HILLCRIST. My third go this year, Fellows.

FELLOWS. Very annoying, sir.

HILLCRIST. Ye—es. Ever had it?

FELLOWS. I fancy I have had a twinge, sir.

HILLCRIST. [*Brightening*] Have you? Where?

FELLOWS. In my cork wrist, sir.

HILLCRIST. Your what?

FELLOWS. The wrist I draw corks with.

HILLCRIST. [*With a cackle*] You'd have had more than a twinge if you'd lived with my father. H'm!

FELLOWS. Excuse me, sir—Vichy water corks, in my experience, are worse than any wine.

HILLCRIST. [*Ironically*] Ah! The country's not what it was, is it, Fellows?

FELLOWS. Getting very new, sir.

HILLCRIST. [*Feelingly*] You're right. Has Dawker come?

FELLOWS. Not yet, sir. The Jackmans would like to see you, sir.

HILLCRIST. What about?

FELLOWS. I don't know, sir.

HILLCRIST. Well, show them in.

FELLOWS. [*Going*] Yes, sir.

HILLCRIST *turns his swivel chair round. The* JACKMANS *come in. He, a big fellow about fifty, in a labourer's dress, with eyes which have more in them than his tongue can express; she, a little woman with a worn face, a bright, quick glance, and a tongue to match.*

HILLCRIST. Good morning, Mrs Jackman! Morning, Jackman! Haven't seen you for a long time. What can I do? [*He draws in foot, and breath, with a sharp hiss*].

JACKMAN. [*In a down-hearted voice*] We've had notice to quit, sir.

HILLCRIST. [*With emphasis*] What!

JACKMAN. Got to be out this week.

MRS J. Yes, sir, indeed.

HILLCRIST. Well, but when I sold Longmeadow and the cottages, it was on the express understanding that there was to be no disturbance of tenancies.

MRS J. Yes, sir; but we've all got to go. Mrs 'Arvey, and the Drews, an' us, and there isn't another cottage to be had anywhere in Deepwater.

HILLCRIST. I know; I want one for my cowman. This won't do at all. Where do you get it from?

JACKMAN. Mr 'Ornblower, 'imself, sir. Just an hour ago. He come round and said: "I'm sorry; I want the cottages, and you've got to clear."

MRS J. [*Bitterly*] He's no gentleman, sir; he put it so brisk. We been there thirty years, and now we don't know what to do. So I hope you'll excuse us coming round, sir.

HILLCRIST. I should think so, indeed! H'm! [*He rises and limps across to the fireplace on his stick. To himself*] The cloven hoof. By George! this is a breach of faith. I'll write to him, Jackman. Confound it! I'd certainly never have sold if I'd known he was going to do this.

MRS J. No, sir, I'm sure, sir. They do say it's to do with the potteries. He wants the cottages for his workmen.

HILLCRIST. [*Sharply*] That's all very well, but he shouldn't have led me to suppose that he would make no change.

JACKMAN. [*Heavily*] They talk about his havin' bought the Centry to put up more chimneys there, and that's why he wants the cottages.

HILLCRIST. The Centry ! Impossible !

MRS J. Yes, sir ; it's such a pretty spot—looks beautiful from here. [*She looks out through the window*] Loveliest spot in all Deepwater, I always say. And your father owned it, and his father before 'im. It's a pity they ever sold it, sir, beggin' your pardon.

HILLCRIST. The Centry ! [*He rings the bell*].

MRS J. [*Who has brightened up*] I'm glad you're goin' to stop it, sir. It does put us about. We don't know where to go. I said to Mr Hornblower, I said, " I'm sure Mr Hillcrist would never 'ave turned us out." An' 'e said : " Mr Hillcrist be ——" beggin' your pardon, sir. " Make no mistake," 'e said, " you must go, missis." He don't even know our name ; an' to come it like this over us ! He's a dreadful new man, I think, with his overridin' notions. And sich a heavy-footed man, to look at. [*With a sort of indulgent contempt*] But he's from the North, they say.

FELLOWS *has entered, Left.*

HILLCRIST. Ask Mrs Hillcrist if she'll come.

FELLOWS. Very good, sir.

HILLCRIST. Is Dawker here ?

FELLOWS. Not yet, sir.

HILLCRIST. I want to see him at once.

FELLOWS *retires.*

JACKMAN. Mr Hornblower said he was comin' on to see you, sir. So we thought we'd step along first.

HILLCRIST. Quite right, Jackman.

MRS J. I said to Jackman : " Mr Hillcrist'll stand

up for us, I know. He's a gentleman," I said. "This man," I said, "don't care for the neighbourhood, or the people; he don't care for anything so long as he makes his money, and has his importance. You can't expect it, I suppose," I said; [*Bitterly*] "havin' got rich so sudden." The gentry don't do things like that.

HILLCRIST. [*Abstracted*] Quite, Mrs Jackman, quite! [*To himself*] The Centry! No!

MRS HILLCRIST *enters. A well-dressed woman, with a firm, clear-cut face.*

Oh! Amy! Mr and Mrs Jackman turned out of their cottage, and Mrs Harvey, and the Drews. When I sold to Hornblower, I stipulated that they shouldn't be.

MRS J. Our week's up on Saturday, ma'am, and I'm sure I don't know where we shall turn, because of course Jackman must be near his work, and I shall lose me washin' if we have to go far.

HILLCRIST. [*With decision*] You leave it to me, Mrs Jackman. Good morning! Morning, Jackman! Sorry I can't move with this gout.

MRS J. [*For them both*] I'm sure we're very sorry, sir. Good morning, sir. Good morning, ma'am; and thank you kindly.

They go out.

HILLCRIST. Turning people out that have been there thirty years. I won't have it. It's a breach of faith.

MRS H. Do you suppose this Hornblower will care two straws about that, Jack?

HILLCRIST. He must, when it's put to him, if he's got any decent feeling.

MRS H. He hasn't.

HILLCRIST. [*Suddenly*] The Jackmans talk of his having bought the Centry to put up more chimneys.

MRS H. Never! [*At the window, looking out*] Impossible! It would rúin the place utterly, besides cutting us off from the Duke's. Oh, no! Miss Mullins would never sell behind our backs.

HILLCRIST. Anyway I must stop his turning these people out.

MRS H. [*With a little smile, almost contemptuous*] You might have known he'd do something of the sort. You will imagine people are like yourself, Jack. You always ought to make Dawker have things in black and white.

HILLCRIST. I said quite distinctly: "Of course you won't want to disturb the tenancies; there's a great shortage of cottages." Hornblower told me as distinctly that he wouldn't. What more do you want?

MRS H. A man like that thinks of nothing but the short cut to his own way. [*Looking out of the window towards the rise*] If he buys the Centry and puts up chimneys, we simply couldn't stop here.

HILLCRIST. My father would turn in his grave.

MRS H. It would have been more useful if he'd not dipped the estate, and sold the Centry. This Hornblower hates us; he thinks we turn up our noses at him.

HILLCRIST. As we do, Amy.

MRS H. Who wouldn't? A man without traditions, who believes in nothing but money and push.

HILLCRIST. Suppose he won't budge, can we do anything for the Jackmans?

MRS H. There are the two rooms Beaver used to have, over the stables.

FELLOWS *enters.*

FELLOWS. Mr Dawker, sir.

DAWKER *is a short, square, rather red-faced terrier of a man, in riding clothes and gaiters.*

HILLCRIST. Ah! Dawker, I've got gout again.

DAWKER. Very sorry, sir. How de do, ma'am?

HILLCRIST. Did you meet the Jackmans?

DAWKER. Yeh. [*He hardly ever quite finishes a word, seeming to snap off their tails.*]

HILLCRIST. Then you heard?

DAWKER. [*Nodding*] Smart man, Hornblower; never lets grass grow.

HILLCRIST. Smart?

DAWKER. [*Grinning*] Don't do to underrate your neighbours.

MRS H. A cad—I call him.

DAWKER. That's it, ma'am—got all the advantage.

HILLCRIST. Heard anything about the Centry, Dawker?

DAWKER. Hornblower wants to buy.

HILLCRIST. Miss Mullins would never sell, would she?

DAWKER. She wants to.

HILLCRIST. The deuce she does!

DAWKER. He won't stick at the price either.

MRS H. What's it worth, Dawker ?

DAWKER. Depends on what you want it for.

MRS H. He wants it for spite ; we want it for sentiment.

DAWKER. [*Grinning*] Worth what you like to give, then ; but he's a rich man.

MRS H. Intolerable !

DAWKER. [*To* HILLCRIST] Give me your figure, sir. I'll try the old lady before he gets at her.

HILLCRIST. [*Pondering*] I don't want to buy, unless there's nothing else for it. I should have to raise the money on the estate ; it won't stand much more. I can't believe the fellow would be such a barbarian. Chimneys within three hundred yards, right in front of this house ! It's a nightmare.

MRS H. You'd much better let Dawker make sure, Jack.

HILLCRIST. [*Uncomfortable*] Jackman says Hornblower's coming round to see me. I shall put it to him.

DAWKER. Make him keener than ever. Better get in first.

HILLCRIST. Ape his methods !—Ugh ! Confound this gout ! [*He gets back to his chair with difficulty*] Look here, Dawker, I wanted to see you about gates—

FELLOWS. [*Entering*] Mr Hornblower.

HORNBLOWER *enters—a man of medium height, thoroughly broadened, blown out, as it were, by success. He has thick, coarse*

dark hair, just grizzled, very bushy eyebrows, a wide mouth. He wears quite ordinary clothes, as if that department were in charge of someone who knew about such things. He has a small rose in his buttonhole, and carries a Homburg hat, which one suspects will look too small on his head.

HORNBLOWER. Good morning! good morning! How are ye, Dawker? Fine morning! Lovely weather!

His voice has a curious blend in its tone of brass and oil, and an accent not quite Scotch nor quite North country.

Haven't seen ye for a long time, Hillcrist.

HILLCRIST. [*Who has risen*] Not since I sold you Longmeadow and those cottages, I believe.

HORNBLOWER. Dear me, now! that's what I came about.

HILLCRIST. [*Subsiding again into his chair*] Forgive me! Won't you sit down?

HORNBLOWER. [*Not sitting*] Have ye got gout? That's unfortunate. I never get it. I've no disposition that way. Had no ancestors, you see. Just me own drinkin' to answer for.

HILLCRIST. You're lucky.

HORNBLOWER. I wonder if Mrs Hillcrist thinks that! Am I lucky to have no past, ma'am? Just the future?

MRS H. You're sure you have the future, Mr Hornblower?

HORNBLOWER. [*With a laugh*] That's your aristo-

cratic rapier thrust. You aristocrats are very hard people underneath your manners. Ye love to lay a body out. But I've got the future all right.

HILLCRIST. [*Meaningly*] I've had the Jackmans here, Mr Hornblower.

HORNBLOWER. Who are they—man with the little spitfire wife ?

HILLCRIST. They're very excellent, good people, and they've been in that cottage quietly thirty years.

HORNBLOWER. [*Throwing out his forefinger—a favourite gesture*] Ah ! ye've wanted me to stir ye up a bit. Deepwater needs a bit o' go put into it. There's generally some go where I am. I daresay you wish there'd been no " come." [*He laughs*].

MRS H. We certainly like people to keep their word, Mr Hornblower.

HILLCRIST. Amy !

HORNBLOWER. Never mind, Hillcrist ; takes more than that to upset me.

MRS HILLCRIST *exchanges a look with* DAWKER, *who slips out unobserved.*

HILLCRIST. You promised me, you know, not to change the tenancies.

HORNBLOWER. Well, I've come to tell ye that I have. I wasn't expecting to have the need when I bought. Thought the Duke would sell me a bit down there ; but devil a bit he will ; and now I must have those cottages for my workmen. I've got important works, ye know.

HILLCRIST. [*Getting heated*] The Jackmans have

their importance too, sir. Their heart's in that cottage.

HORNBLOWER. Have a sense of proportion, man. My works supply thousands of people, and *my* heart's in *them*. What's more, they make my fortune. I've got ambitions—I'm a serious man. Suppose I were to consider this and that, and every little potty objection—where should I get to ?—nowhere !

HILLCRIST. All the same, this sort of thing isn't done, you know.

HORNBLOWER. Not by you because ye've got no need to do it. Here ye are, quite content on what your fathers made for ye. Ye've no ambitions ; and ye want other people to have none. How d'ye think your fathers got your land ?

HILLCRIST. [*Who has risen*] Not by breaking their word.

HORNBLOWER. [*Throwing out his finger*] Don't ye believe it. They got it by breaking their word and turnin' out Jackmans, if that's their name, all over the place.

MRS H. That's an insult, Mr Hornblower.

HORNBLOWER. No ; it's a repartee. If ye think so much of these Jackmans, build them a cottage yourselves ; ye've got the space.

HILLCRIST. That's beside the point. You promised me, and I sold on that understanding.

HORNBLOWER. And I bought on the understandin' that I'd get some more land from the Duke.

HILLCRIST. That's nothing to do with me.

HORNBLOWER. Ye'll find it has ; because I'm going to have those cottages.

HILLCRIST. Well, I call it simply—[*He checks himself*].

HORNBLOWER. Look here, Hillcrist, ye've not had occasion to understand men like me. I've got the guts, and I've got the money, and I don't sit still on it. I'm going ahead because I believe in meself. I've no use for sentiment and that sort of thing. Forty of your Jackmans aren't worth me little finger.

HILLCRIST. [*Angry*] Of all the blatant things I ever heard said !——

HORNBLOWER. Well, as we're speaking plainly, I've been thinkin'. Ye want the village run your old-fashioned way, and I want it run mine. I fancy there's not room for the two of us here.

MRS H. When are you going ?

HORNBLOWER. Never fear, *I'm* not going.

HILLCRIST. Look here, Mr Hornblower — this infernal gout makes me irritable—puts me at a disadvantage. But I should be glad if you'd kindly explain yourself.

HORNBLOWER. [*With a great smile*] Ca' canny ; I'm fra' the North.

HILLCRIST. I'm told you wish to buy the Centry and put more of your chimneys up there, regardless of the fact [*He points through the window*] that it would utterly ruin the house we've had for generations, and all our pleasure here.

HORNBLOWER. How the man talks ! Why ! Ye'd

think he owned the sky, because his fathers built him a house with a pretty view, where he's nothing to do but live. It's sheer want of something to do that gives ye your fine sentiments, Hillcrist.

HILLCRIST. Have the goodness not to charge me with idleness. Dawker—where is he ?—[*He shows the bureau*] When you do the drudgery of your works as thoroughly as I do that of my estate—— Is it true about the Centry ?

HORNBLOWER. Gospel true. If ye want to know, my son Chearlie is buyin' it this very minute.

MRS H. [*Turning with a start*] What do you say ?

HORNBLOWER. Ay, he's with the old lady ; she wants to sell, an' she'll get her price, whatever it is.

HILLCRIST. [*With deep anger*] If that isn't a skin game, Mr Hornblower, I don't know what is.

HORNBLOWER. Ah ! Ye've got a very nice ex pression there. "Skin game !" Well, bad words break no bones, an' they're wonderful for hardenin' the heart. If it wasn't for a lady's presence, I could give ye a specimen or two.

MRS H. Oh ! Mr Hornblower, that need not stop you, I'm sure.

HORNBLOWER. Well, and I don't know that it need. Ye're an obstruction—the like of you—ye're in my path. And anyone in my path doesn't stay there long ; or, if he does, he stays there on my terms. And my terms are chimneys in the Centry where I need 'em. It'll do ye a power of good, too, to know that ye're not almighty.

HILLCRIST. And that's being neighbourly !

HORNBLOWER. And how have ye tried bein' neighbourly to me? If I haven't a wife, I've got a daughter-in-law. Have ye called on her, ma'am? I'm new, and ye're an old family. Ye don't like me, ye think I'm a pushin' man. I go to chapel, an' ye don't like that. I make things and I sell them, and ye don't like that. I buy land, and ye don't like that. It threatens the view from your windies. Well, I don't like you, and I'm not goin' to put up with your attitude. Ye've had things your own way too long, and now ye're not going to have them any longer.

HILLCRIST. Will you hold to your word over those cottages?

HORNBLOWER. I'm goin' to have the cottages. I need them, and more besides, now I'm to put up me new works.

HILLCRIST. That's a declaration of war.

HORNBLOWER. Ye never said a truer word. It's one or the other of us, and I rather think it's goin' to be me. I'm the risin' and you're the settin' sun, as the poet says.

HILLCRIST. [*Touching the bell*] We shall see if you can ride rough-shod like this. We used to have decent ways of going about things here. You want to change all that. Well, we shall do our damnedest to stop you. [*To* FELLOWS *at the door*] Are the Jackmans still in the house? Ask them to be good enough to come in.

HORNBLOWER. [*With the first sign of uneasiness*] I've seen these people. I've nothing more to say

to them. I told 'em I'd give 'em five pounds to cover their moving.

HILLCRIST. It doesn't occur to you that people, however humble, like to have some say in their own fate ?

HORNBLOWER. I never had any say in mine till I had the brass, and nobody ever will. It's all hypocrisy. You county folk are fair awful hypocrites. Ye talk about good form and all that sort o' thing. It's just the comfortable doctrine of the man in the saddle ; sentimental varnish. Ye're every bit as hard as I am, underneath.

MRS H. [*Who had been standing very still all this time*] You flatter us.

HORNBLOWER. Not at all. God helps those who 'elp themselves—that's at the bottom of all religion. I'm goin' to help meself, and God's going to help me.

MRS H. I admire your knowledge.

HILLCRIST. We are in the right, and God helps——

HORNBLOWER. Don't ye believe it ; ye 'aven't got the energy.

MRS H. Nor perhaps the conceit.

HORNBLOWER. [*Throwing out his forefinger*] No, no ; 'tisn't conceit to believe in yourself when ye've got reason to.

The JACKMANS *have entered.*

HILLCRIST. I'm very sorry, Mrs Jackman, but I just wanted you to realise that I've done my best with this gentleman.

MRS J. [*Doubtfully*] Yes, sir. I thought if you spoke for us, he'd feel different-like.

HORNBLOWER. One cottage is the same as another, missis. I made ye a fair offer of five pounds for the moving.

JACKMAN. [*Slowly*] We wouldn't take fifty to go out of that 'ouse. We brought up three children there, an' buried two from it.

MRS J. [*To* MRS HILLCRIST] We're attached to it like, ma'am.

HILLCRIST. [*To* HORNBLOWER] How would you like being turned out of a place you were fond of ?

HORNBLOWER. Not a bit. But little considerations have to give way to big ones. Now, missis, I'll make it ten pounds, and I'll send a wagon to shift your things. If that isn't fair—! Ye'd better accept, I shan't keep it open.

The JACKMANS *look at each other ; their faces show deep anger—and the question they ask each other is which will speak.*

MRS J. We won't take it ; eh, George ?

JACKMAN. Not a farden. We come there when we was married.

HORNBLOWER. [*Throwing out his finger*] Ye're very improvident folk.

HILLCRIST. Don't lecture them, Mr Hornblower ; they come out of this miles above you.

HORNBLOWER. [*Angry*] Well, I *was* going to give ye another week, but ye'll go out next Saturday ; and take care ye're not late, or your things'll be put out—in the rain.

MRS H. [*To* MRS JACKMAN] We'll send down for your things, and you can come to us for the time being.

MRS JACKMAN *drops a curtsey; her eyes stab* HORNBLOWER.

JACKMAN. [*Heavily, clenching his fists*] You're no gentleman! Don't put temptation in my way, that's all.

HILLCRIST. [*In a low voice*] Jackman!

HORNBLOWER. [*Triumphantly*] Ye hear that? That's your protegee! Keep out o' *my* way, me man, or I'll put the police on to ye for utterin' threats.

HILLCRIST. You'd better go now, Jackman.

The JACKMANS *move to the door.*

MRS J. [*Turning*] Maybe you'll repent it some day, sir.

They go out, MRS HILLCRIST *following.*

HORNBLOWER. We—ell, I'm sorry they're such unreasonable folk. I never met people with less notion of which side their bread was buttered.

HILLCRIST. And I never met anyone so pachydermatous.

HORNBLOWER. What's that, in Heaven's name? Ye needn' wrap it up in long words now your good lady's gone.

HILLCRIST. [*With dignity*] I'm not going in for a slanging match. I resent your conduct much too deeply.

HORNBLOWER. Look here, Hillcrist, I don't object to you personally; ye seem to me a poor creature that's bound to get left with your gout and your dignity; but of course ye can make yourself very disagreeable before ye're done. Now I want to be the movin' spirit here. I'm full of plans. I'm goin'

to stand for Parliament; I'm goin' to make this a prosperous place. I'm a good-natured man if you'll treat me as such. Now, you take me on as a neighbour and all that, and I'll manage without chimneys on the Centry. Is it a bargain? [*He holds out his hand*].

HILLCRIST. [*Ignoring it*] I thought you said you didn't keep your word when it suited you to break it?

HORNBLOWER. Now, don't get on the high horse. You and me could be very good friends; but I can be a very nasty enemy. The chimneys will not look nice from that windie, ye know.

HILLCRIST. [*Deeply angry*] Mr Hornblower, if you think I'll take your hand after this Jackman business, you're greatly mistaken. You are proposing that I shall stand in with you while you tyrannise over the neighbourhood. Please realise that unless you leave those tenancies undisturbed as you said you would, we don't know each other.

HORNBLOWER. Well, that won't trouble me much. Now, ye'd better think it over; ye've got gout and that makes ye hasty. I tell ye again: I'm not the man to make an enemy of. Unless ye're friendly, sure as I stand here I'll ruin the look of your place.

[*The toot of a car is heard.*

There's my car. I sent Chearlie and his wife in it to buy the Centry. And make no mistake—he's got it in his pocket. It's your last chance, Hillcrist. I'm not averse to you as a man; I think ye're the best of the fossils round here; at least, I think ye can do me the most harm socially. Come now! [*He holds out his hand again*].

HILLCRIST. Not if you'd bought the Centry ten times over. Your ways are not mine, and I'll have nothing to do with you.

HORNBLOWER. [*Very angry*] Really! Is that so? Very well. Now ye're goin' to learn something, an' it's time ye did. D'ye realise that I'm very nearly round ye? [*He draws a circle slowly in the air*] I'm at Uphill, the works are here, here's Longmeadow, here's the Centry that I've just bought, there's only the Common left to give ye touch with the world. Now between you and the Common there's the high road. I come out on the high road here to your north, and I shall come out on it there to your west. When I've got me new works up on the Centry, I shall be makin' a trolley track between the works up to the road at both ends, so my goods will be running right round ye. How'll ye like that for a country place?

For answer HILLCRIST, *who is angry beyond the power of speech, walks, forgetting to use his stick, up to the French window. While he stands there, with his back to* HORNBLOWER, *the door L. is flung open, and* JILL *enters, preceding* CHARLES, *his wife* CHLOE, *and* ROLF. CHARLES *is a goodish-looking, moustached young man of about twenty-eight, with a white rim to the collar of his waistcoat, and spats. He has his hand behind* CHLOE'S *back, as if to prevent her turning tail. She is rather a handsome young woman, with dark eyes, full red lips, and a suspicion of powder, a little under-*

dressed for the country. ROLF, *who brings up the rear, is about twenty, with an open face and stiffish butter-coloured hair.* JILL *runs over to her father at the window. She has a bottle.*

JILL. [*Sotto voce*] Look, Dodo, I've brought the lot! Isn't it a treat, dear Papa? And here's the stuff. Hallo!

The exclamation is induced by the apprehension that there has been a row. HILLCRIST *gives a stiff little bow, remaining where he is in the window.* JILL *stays close to him, staring from one to the other, then blocks him off and engages him in conversation.* CHARLES *has gone up to his father, who has remained maliciously still, where he delivered his last speech.* CHLOE *and* ROLF *stand awkwardly waiting between the fireplace and the door.*

HORNBLOWER, Well, Chearlie?

CHARLES. Not got it.

HORNBLOWER. *Not!*

CHARLES. I'd practically got her to say she'd sell at three thousand five hundred, when that fellow Dawker turned up.

HORNBLOWER. That bull-terrier of a chap! Why, he was *here* a while ago. Oh—ho! So that's it!

CHARLES. I heard him gallop up. He came straight for the old lady, and got her away. What he said I don't know; but she came back looking wiser than an owl; said she'd think it over, thought she had other views.

HORNBLOWER. Did ye tell her she might have her price ?

CHARLES. Practically I did.

HORNBLOWER. Well ?

CHARLES. She thought it would be fairer to put it up to auction. There were other enquiries. Oh ! She's a leery old bird—reminds me of one of those pictures of Fate, don't you know.

HORNBLOWER. Auction ! Well, if it's not gone we'll get it yet. That damned little Dawker ! I've had a row with Hillcrist.

CHARLES. I thought so.

They are turning cautiously to look at HILLCRIST, *when* JILL *steps forward.*

JILL. [*Flushed and determined*] That's not a bit sporting of you, Mr Hornblower.

At her words ROLF *comes forward too.*

HORNBLOWER. Ye should hear both sides before ye say that, missy.

JILL. There isn't another side to turning out the Jackmans after you'd promised.

HORNBLOWER. Oh ! dear me, yes. They don't matter a row of gingerbread to the schemes I've got for betterin' this neighbourhood.

JILL. I *had* been standing up for you ; now I won't.

HORNBLOWER. Dear, dear ! What'll become of me ?

JILL. I won't say anything about the other thing because I think it's beneath dignity to notice it. But to turn poor people out of their cottages is a shame.

HORNBLOWER. Hoity me!

ROLF. [*Suddenly*] You haven't been doing that, father?

CHARLES. Shut up, Rolf!

HORNBLOWER. [*Turning on* ROLF] Ha! Here's a league o' youth! My young whipper-snapper, keep your mouth shut and leave it to your elders to know what's right.

Under the weight of this rejoinder ROLF *stands biting his lips. Then he throws his head up.*

ROLF. I hate it!

HORNBLOWER. [*With real venom*] Oh! Ye hate it? Ye can get out of my house, then.

JILL. Free speech, Mr Hornblower; don't be violent.

HORNBLOWER. Ye're right, young lady. Ye can stay in my house, Rolf, and learn manners. Come, Chearlie!

JILL. [*Quite softly*] Mr Hornblower!

HILLCRIST. [*From the window*] Jill!

JILL. [*Impatiently*] Well, what's the good of it? Life's too short for rows, and too jolly!

ROLF. Bravo!

HORNBLOWER. [*Who has shown a sign of weakening*] Now, look here! I will not have revolt in my family. Ye'll just have to learn that a man who's worked as I have, who's risen as I have, and who knows the world, is the proper judge of what's right and wrong. I'll answer to God for me actions, and not to you young people.

JILL. Poor God!

HORNBLOWER. [*Genuinely shocked*] Ye blasphemous young thing! [*To* ROLF] And ye're just as bad, ye young freethinker. I won't have it.

HILLCRIST. [*Who has come down, Right*] Jill, I wish you would kindly not talk.

JILL. I can't help it.

CHARLES. [*Putting his arm through* HORNBLOWER'S] Come along, father! Deeds, not words.

HORNBLOWER. Ay! Deeds!

MRS HILLCRIST and DAWKER *have entered by the French window.*

MRS H. Quite right!

They all turn and look at her.

HORNBLOWER. Ah! So ye put your dog on to it. [*He throws out his finger at* DAWKER] Very smart, that—I give ye credit.

MRS H. [*Pointing to* CHLOE, *who has stood by herself, forgotten and uncomfortable throughout the scene*] May I ask who this lady is?

CHLOE *turns round startled, and her vanity bag slips down her dress to the floor.*

HORNBLOWER. No, ma'am, ye may not, for ye know perfectly well.

JILL. *I* brought her in, mother [*She moves to* CHLOE'S *side*].

MRS H. Will you take her out again, then.

HILLCRIST. Amy, have the goodness to remember——

MRS H. That this is my house so far as ladies are concerned.

JILL. Mother!

She looks astonished at CHLOE, *who, about to speak, does not, passing her eyes, with a queer, half-scared expression, from* MRS HILLCRIST *to* DAWKER.

[*To* CHLOE] I'm awfully sorry. Come on!

They go out, Left. ROLF *hurries after them.*

CHARLES. You've insulted my wife. Why? What do you mean by it?

MRS HILLCRIST *simply smiles.*

HILLCRIST. I apologise. I regret extremely. There is no reason why the ladies of your family or of mine should be involved in our quarrel. For Heaven's sake, let's fight like gentlemen.

HORNBLOWER. Catchwords—sneers! No; we'll play what ye call a skin game, Hillcrist, without gloves on; we won't spare each other. Ye look out for yourselves, for, begod, after this morning I mean business. And as for you, Dawker, ye sly dog, ye think yourself very clever; but I'll have the Centry yet. Come, Chearlie!

They go out, passing JILL, *who is coming in again, in the doorway.*

HILLCRIST. Well, Dawker?

DAWKER. [*Grinning*] Safe for the moment. The old lady'll put it up to auction. Couldn't get her to budge from that. Says she don't want to be unneighbourly to either. But, if you ask me, it's money she smells!

JILL. [*Advancing*] *Now*, mother!

MRS H. Well?

JILL. Why did you insult her?

MRS H. I think I only asked you to take her out.

JILL. Why? Even if she is Old Combustion's daughter-in-law?

MRS H. My dear Jill, allow me to judge the sort of acquaintances I wish to make [*She looks at* DAWKER].

JILL. She's all right. Lots of women powder and touch up their lips nowadays. I think she's rather a good sort; she was awfully upset.

MRS H. Too upset.

JILL. Oh! don't be so mysterious, mother. If you know something, do spit it out!

MRS H. Do you wish me to—er—"spit it out," Jack?

HILLCRIST. Dawker, if you don't mind——

DAWKER, with a nod, passes away out of the French window.

Jill, be respectful, and don't talk like a bargee.

JILL. It's no good, Dodo. It made me ashamed. It's just as—as caddish to insult people who haven't said a word, in your own house, as it is to be—old Hornblower.

MRS H. You don't know what you're talking about.

HILLCRIST. What's the matter with young Mrs Hornblower?

MRS H. Excuse me, I shall keep my thoughts to myself at present.

She looks coldly at JILL, *and goes out through the French window.*

HILLCRIST. You've thoroughly upset your mother, Jill.

JILL. It's something Dawker's told her; I saw them. I don't like Dawker, father, he's so common.

HILLCRIST. My dear, we can't all be uncommon. He's got lots of go. You must apologise to your mother.

JILL. [*Shaking her clubbed hair*] They'll make you do things you don't approve of, Dodo, if you don't look out. Mother's fearfully bitter when she gets her knife in. If old Hornblower's disgusting, it's no reason we should be.

HILLCRIST. So you think I'm capable—that's nice, Jill!

JILL. No, no, darling! I only want to warn you solemnly that mother'll tell you you're fighting fair, no matter what she and Dawker do.

HILLCRIST. [*Smiling*] Jill, I don't think I ever saw you so serious.

JILL. No. Because—[*She swallows a lump in her throat*] Well—I was just beginning to enjoy myself; and now—everything's going to be bitter and beastly, with mother in that mood. That horrible old man! Oh, Dodo! Don't let them make *you* horrid! You're such a darling. How's your gout, ducky?

HILLCRIST. Better; lot better.

JILL. There, you see! That shows! It's going to be half interesting for you, but not for—us.

HILLCRIST. Look here, Jill—is there anything between you and young what's-his-name—Rolf?

JILL. [*Biting her lip*] No. But—now it's *all* spoiled.

HILLCRIST. You can't expect me to regret that.

JILL. I don't mean any tosh about love's young dream; but I do like being friends. I want to *enjoy* things, Dodo, and you can't do that when everybody's on the hate. You're going to wallow in it, and so shall I—oh! I know I shall!—we shall all wallow, and think of nothing but "one for his nob."

HILLCRIST. Aren't you fond of your home?

JILL. Of course. I love it.

HILLCRIST. Well, you won't be able to live in it unless we stop that ruffian. Chimneys and smoke, the trees cut down, piles of pots. Every kind of abomination. There! [*He points*] Imagine! [*He points through the French window, as if he could see those chimneys rising and marring the beauty of the fields*] I was born here, and my father, and his, and his, and his. They loved those fields, and those old trees. And this barbarian, with his "improvement" schemes, forsooth! I learned to ride in the Centry meadows—prettiest spring meadows in the world; I've climbed every tree there. Why my father ever sold—! But who could have imagined this? And come at a bad moment, when money's scarce.

JILL. [*Cuddling his arm*] Dodo!

HILLCRIST. Yes. But you don't love the place as I do, Jill. You youngsters don't love anything, I sometimes think.

JILL. I do, Dodo, I do!

HILLCRIST. You've got it all before you. But you

may live your life and never find anything so good and so beautiful as this old home. I'm not going to have it spoiled without a fight.

Conscious of having betrayed sentiment, he walks out at the French window, passing away to the Right. JILL, *following to the window, looks. Then throwing back her head, she clasps her hands behind it.*

JILL. Oh—oh—oh !

A voice behind her says, " JILL ! " *She turns and starts back, leaning against the right lintel of the window.* ROLF *appears outside the window from Left.*

Who goes there ?

ROLF. [*Buttressed against the Left lintel*] Enemy—after Chloe's bag.

JILL. Pass, enemy ! And all's ill !

ROLF *passes through the window, and retrieves the vanity bag from the floor where* CHLOE *dropped it, then again takes his stand against the Left lintel of the French window.*

ROLF. It's not going to make any difference, is it ?

JILL. You know it is.

ROLF. Sins of the fathers.

JILL. Unto the third and fourth generation. What sin has *my* father committed ?

ROLF. None, in a way ; only, I've often told you I don't see why you should treat us as outsiders. We don't like it.

JILL. Well, you shouldn't be, then; I mean, *he* shouldn't be.

ROLF. Father's just as human as your father; he's wrapped up in us, and all his "getting on" is for us. Would you like to be treated as your mother treated Chloe? Your mother's set the stroke for the other big-wigs about here; nobody calls on Chloe. And why not? Why not? I think it's contemptible to bar people just because they're *new*, as you call it, and have to make their position instead of having it left them.

JILL. It's *not* because they're new, it's because—if your father behaved like a gentleman, he'd be treated like one.

ROLF. Would he? I don't believe it. My father's a very able man; he thinks he's entitled to have influence here. Well, everybody tries to keep him down. Oh! yes, they do. That makes him mad and more determined than ever to get his way. You ought to be just, Jill.

JILL. I *am* just.

ROLF. No, you're not. Besides, what's it got to do with Charlie and Chloe? Chloe's particularly harmless. It's pretty sickening for her. Father didn't expect people to call until Charlie married, but since——

JILL. I think it's all very petty.

ROLF. It *is*—a dog-in-the-manger business; I did think *you* were above it.

JILL. How would you like to have your home spoiled?

ROLF. I'm not going to argue. Only things don't stand still. Homes aren't any more proof against change than anything else.

JILL. All right! You come and try and take ours.

ROLF. We don't want to take your home.

JILL. Like the Jackmans'?

ROLF. All right. I see you're hopelessly prejudiced. [*He turns to go*].

JILL. [*Just as he is vanishing—softly*] Enemy?

ROLF. [*Turning*] Yes, enemy.

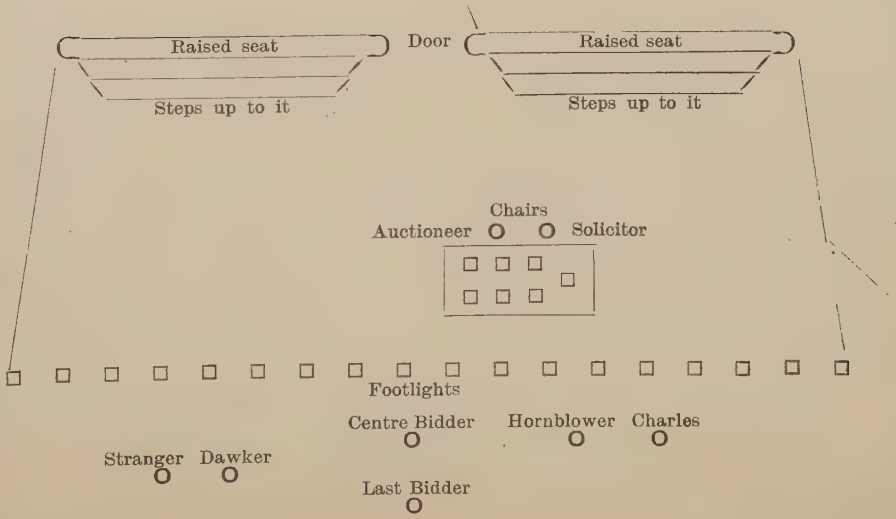
JILL. Before the battle—let's shake hands.

They move from the lintels and grasp each other's hands in the centre of the French window.

CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT II. Scene I.



ACT II

SCENE I

A billiard room in a provincial hotel, where things are bought and sold. The scene is set well forward, and is not very broad; it represents the auctioneer's end of the room, having, rather to stage Left, a narrow table with two chairs facing the audience, where the auctioneer will sit and stand. The table which is set forward to the footlights, is littered with green-covered particulars of sale. The audience are in effect public and bidders. There is a door on the Left, level with the table. Along the back wall, behind the table, are two raised benches with two steps up to them, such as billiard rooms often have, divided by a door in the middle of a wall, which is panelled in oak. Late September sunlight is coming from a skylight (not visible) on to these seats. The stage is empty when the curtain goes up, but DAWKER *and* MRS HILLCRIST *are just entering through the door at the back.*

DAWKER. Be out of their way here, ma'am. See old Hornblower with Chearlie? [*He points down to the audience*].

MRS H. It begins at three, doesn't it?

DAWKER. They won't be over punctual; there's only

the Centry selling. There's young Mrs Hornblower with the other boy—[*Pointing*] over at the entrance. I've got that chap I told you of down from town.

MRS H. Ah ! make sure quite of her, Dawker. Any mistake would be fatal.

DAWKER. [*Nodding*] That's right, ma'am. Lot of people—always spare time to watch an auction—ever remark that ? The Duke's agent's here ; shouldn't be surprised if he chipped in.

MRS H. Where did you leave my husband ?

DAWKER. With Miss Jill, in the courtyard. He's coming to you. In case I miss him, tell him when I reach his limit to blow his nose if he wants me to go on ; when he blows it a second time, I'll stop for good. Hope we shan't get to that. Old Hornblower doesn't throw his money away.

MRS H. What limit did you settle ?

DAWKER. Six thousand !

MRS H. That's a fearful price. Well, good luck to you, Dawker !

DAWKER. Good luck, ma'am. I'll go and see to that little matter of Mrs Chloe. Never fear, we'll do them in somehow.

He winks, lays his finger on the side of his nose, and goes out at the door.

MRS HILLCRIST *mounts the two steps, sits down Right of the door, and puts up a pair of long-handled glasses. Through the door behind her come* CHLOE *and* ROLF. *She makes a sign for him to go, and shuts the door.*

CHLOE. [*At the foot of the steps—in the gangway—in a slightly common accent*] Mrs Hillcrist!

MRS H. [*Not quite starting*] I beg your pardon?

CHLOE. [*Again*] Mrs Hillcrist——

HRS H. Well?

CHLOE. I never did you any harm.

MRS H. Did I ever say you did?

CHLOE. No; but you act as if I had.

MRS H. I'm not aware that I've acted at all—as yet. You are nothing to me, except as one of your family.

CHLOE. 'Tisn't I that wants to spoil your home.

MRS H. Stop them then. I see your husband down there with his father.

CHLOE. I—I have tried.

MRS H. [*Looking at her*] Oh! I suppose such men don't pay attention to what women ask them.

CHLOE. [*With a flash of spirit*] I'm fond of my husband. I——

MRS H. [*Looking at her steadily*] I don't quite know why you spoke to me.

CHLOE. [*With a sort of pathetic sullenness*] I only thought perhaps you'd like to treat me as a human being.

MRS H. Really, if you don't mind, I should like to be left alone just now.

CHLOE. [*Unhappily acquiescent*] Certainly! I'll go to the other end.

She moves to the Left, mounts the steps and sits down.

ROLF, *looking in through the door, and seeing*

where she is, joins her. MRS HILLCRIST *re-settles herself a little further in on the Right.*

ROLF. [*Bending over to* CHLOE, *after a glance at* MRS HILLCRIST] Are you all right ?

CHLOE. It's awfully hot.

She fans herself with the particulars of sale.

ROLF. There's Dawker. I hate that chap !

CHLOE. Where ?

ROLF. Down there ; see ?

He points down to stage Right of the room.

CHLOE. [*Drawing back in her seat with a little gasp*] Oh !

ROLF. [*Not noticing*] Who's that next him, looking up here ?

CHLOE. I don't know.

She has raised her auction programme suddenly, and sits fanning herself, carefully screening her face.

ROLF. [*Looking at her*] Don't you feel well ? Shall I get you some water ? *He gets up at her nod.*

As he reaches the door, HILLCRIST *and* JILL *come in.* HILLCRIST *passes him abstractedly with a nod, and sits down beside his wife.*

JILL. [*To* ROLF] Come to see us turned out ?

ROLF. [*Emphatically*] No. I'm looking after Chloe ; she's not well.

JILL. [*Glancing at her*] Sorry. She needn't have come, I suppose ?

ROLF *deigns no answer, and goes out.*

JILL glances at CHLOE, then at her parents talking in low voices, and sits down next her father, who makes room for her.

MRS H. Can Dawker see you there, Jack ?

HILLCRIST *nods.*

What's the time ?

HILLCRIST. Three minutes to three.

JILL. Don't you feel beastly all down the backs of your legs, Dodo ?

HILLCRIST. Yes.

JILL. Do you, mother ?

MRS H. No.

JILL. A wagon of old Hornblower's pots passed while we were in the yard. It's an omen.

MRS H. Don't be foolish, Jill.

JILL. Look at the old brute ! Dodo, hold my hand.

MRS H. Make sure you've got a handkerchief, Jack.

HILLCRIST. I can't go beyond the six thousand ; I shall have to raise every penny on mortgage as it is. The estate simply won't stand more, Amy.

He feels in his breast pocket, and pulls up the edge of his handkerchief.

JILL. Oh ! Look ! There's Miss Mullins, at the back ; just come in. Isn't she a spidery old chip ?

MRS H. Come to gloat. Really, I think her not accepting your offer is disgusting. Her impartiality is all humbug.

HILLCRIST. Can't blame her for getting what she can—it's human nature. Phew ! I used to feel like this before a *vivâ voce*. Who's that next to Dawker ?

JILL. What a fish !

MRS H. [*To herself*] Ah ! yes.

Her eyes slide round at CHLOE, *sitting motionless and rather sunk in her seat, slowly fanning herself with the particulars of the sale.*

Jack, go and offer her my smelling salts.

HILLCRIST. [*Taking the salts*] Thank God for a human touch !

MRS H. [*Taken aback*] Oh ! I——

JILL. [*With a quick look at her mother, snatching the salts*] I will. [*She goes over to* CHLOE *with the salts*] Have a sniff ; you look awfully white.

CHLOE. [*Looking up, startled*] Oh! no thanks. I'm all right.

JILL. No, do ! You must.

CHLOE *takes them.*

JILL. D'you mind letting me see that a minute ?

She takes the particulars of the sale and studies it, but CHLOE *has buried the lower part of her face in her hand and the smelling salts bottle.*

Beastly hot, isn't it ? You'd better keep that.

CHLOE. [*Her dark eyes wandering and uneasy*] Rolf's getting me some water.

JILL. Why do you stay ? You didn't want to come, did you ?

CHLOE *shakes her head.*

All right ! Here's your water.

She hands back the particulars and slides over to her seat, passing ROLF *in the gangway, with her chin well up.*

MRS HILLCRIST, *who has watched* CHLOE *and* JILL *and* DAWKER *and his friend, makes an enquiring movement with her hand, but gets a disappointing answer.*

JILL. What's the time, Dodo ?

HILLCRIST. [*Looking at his watch*] Three minutes past.

JILL. [*Sighing*] Oh, hell !

HILLCRIST. Jill !

JILL. Sorry, Dodo. I was only thinking. Look ! Here he is ! Phew !—isn't he——?

MRS H. 'Sh !

The AUCTIONEER *comes in Left and goes to the table. He is a square, short, brown-faced, common-looking man, with clipped grey hair fitting him like a cap, and a clipped grey moustache. His lids come down over his quick eyes, till he can see you very sharply, and you can hardly see that he can see you. He can break into a smile at any moment, which has no connection with him, as it were. By a certain hurt look, however, when bidding is slow, he discloses that he is not merely an auctioneer, but has in him elements of the human being. He can wink with anyone, and is dressed in a snuff-brown suit, with a perfectly unbuttoned waistcoat, a low, turned-down collar, and small black and white sailor-knot tie. While he is settling his papers, the* HILLCRISTS *settle themselves tensely.*

Chloe has drunk her water and leaned back again, with the smelling salts to her nose. Rolf *leans forward in the seat beside her, looking sideways at* Jill. *A* Solicitor, *with a grey beard, has joined the* Auctioneer *at his table.*

Auctioneer. [*Tapping the table*] Sorry to disappoint you, gentlemen, but I've only one property to offer you to-day, No. 1, The Centry, Deepwater. The second on the particulars has been withdrawn. The third—that's Bidcot, desirable freehold mansion and farmlands in the Parish of Kenway—we shall have to deal with next week. I shall be happy to sell it you then without reservation. [*He looks again through the particulars in his hand, giving the audience time to readjust themselves to his statements*] Now, gen'lemen, as I say, I've only the one property to sell. Freehold No. 1—all that very desirable corn and stock-rearing and parklike residential land known as the Centry, Deepwater, unique property—an A.1. chance to an A.1. audience. [*With his smile*] Ought to make the price of the three we thought we had. Now you won't mind listening to the conditions of sale; Mr Blinkard'll read 'em, and they won't wirry you, they're very short.

He sits down and gives two little taps on the table.

The Solicitor *rises and reads the conditions of sale in a voice which no one practically can hear. Just as he begins to read these conditions of sale,* Charles Hornblower

enters at back. He stands a moment, glancing round at the HILLCRISTS *and twirling his moustache, then moves along to his wife and touches her.*

CHARLES. Chloe, aren't you well?

In the start which she gives, her face is fully revealed to the audience.

CHARLES. Come along, out of the way of these people.

He jerks his head towards the HILLCRISTS. CHLOE *gives a swift look down to the stage Right of the audience.*

CHLOE. No; I'm all right; it's hotter there.

CHARLES. [*To* ROLF] Well, look after her—I must go back.

ROLF *nods.* CHARLES *slides back to the door, with a glance at the* HILLCRISTS, *of whom* MRS HILLCRIST *has been watching like a lynx. He goes out, just as the* SOLICITOR, *finishing, sits down.*

AUCTIONEER. [*Rising and tapping*] Now, gen'lemen, it's not often a piece of land like this comes into the market. What's that? [*To a friend in front of him*] No better land in Deepwater—that's right, Mr Spicer. I know the village well, and a charming place it is; perfect locality, to be sure. Now I don't want to wirry you by singing the praises of this property; there it is—well-watered, nicely timbered—no reservation of the timber, gen'lemen—no tenancy to hold you up; free to do what you like with it to-morrow. You've got a jewel of a site

there, too; perfect position for a house. It lies between the Duke's and Squire Hillcrist's—an emerald isle. [*With his smile*] No allusion to Ireland, gen'lemen—perfect peace in the Centry. Nothing like it in the county—a gen'leman's site, and you don't get that offered you every day. [*He looks down towards* HORNBLOWER, *stage Left*] Carries the mineral rights, and as you know, perhaps, there's the very valuable Deepwater clay there. What am I to start it at? Can I say three thousand? Well, anything you like to give me. I'm not particular. Come now, you've got more time than me, I expect. Two hundred acres of first-rate grazin' and cornland, with a site for a residence unequalled in the county; and all the possibilities! Well, what shall I say?

Bid from SPICER.

Two thousand? [*With his smile*] That won't hurt you, Mr Spicer. Why, it's worth that to overlook the Duke. For two thousand?

Bid from HORNBLOWER, *stage Left.*

And five. Thank you, sir. Two thousand five hundred bid.

To a friend just below him.

Come, Mr Sandy, don't scratch your head over it.

Bid from DAWKER, *stage Right.*

And five. Three thousand bid for this desirable property. Why, you'd think it wasn't desirable. Come along, gen'lemen. A little spirit.

A slight pause.

JILL. Why can't I *see* the bids, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. The last was Dawker's.

AUCTIONEER. For three thousand. [HORNBLOWER] Three thousand five hundred? May I say four? [*A bid from the centre*] No, I'm not particular; I'll take hundreds. Three thousand six hundred bid. [HORNBLOWER] And seven. Three thousand seven hundred, and—[*He pauses, quartering the audience*].

JILL. Who was that, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Hornblower. It's the Duke in the centre.

AUCTIONEER. Come, gen'lemen, don't keep me all day. Four thousand may I say? [DAWKER] Thank you. We're beginning. And one? [A *bid from the centre*] Four thousand one hundred. [HORNBLOWER] Four thousand two hundred. May I have yours, sir? [*To* DAWKER] And three. Four thousand three hundred bid. No such site in the county, gen'lemen. I'm going to sell this land for what it's worth. You can't bid too much for me. [*He smiles*] [HORNBLOWER] Four thousand five hundred bid. [*Bid from the centre*] And six. [DAWKER] And seven. [HORNBLOWER] And eight. Nine, may I say? [*But the centre has dried up*] [DAWKER] And nine. [HORNBLOWER] Five thousand. Five thousand bid. That's better; there's some spirit in it. For five thousand.

He pauses while he speaks to the SOLICITOR.

HILLCRIST. It's a duel now.

AUCTIONEER. Now, gen'lemen, I'm not going to give this property away. Five thousand bid. [DAWKER] And one. [HORNBLOWER] And two. [DAWKER] And three. Five thousand three

hundred bid. And five, did you say, sir? [HORNBLOWER] Five thousand five hundred bid.

He looks at his particulars.

JILL. [*Rather agonised*] Enemy, Dodo.

AUCTIONEER. This chance may never come again.

"How you'll regret it
If you don't get it,"

as the poet says. May I say five thousand six hundred, sir? [DAWKER] Five thousand six hundred bid. [HORNBLOWER] And seven. [DAWKER] And eight. For five thousand eight hundred pounds. We're gettin' on, but we haven't got the value yet.

A slight pause, while he wipes his brow at the success of his own efforts.

JILL. Us, Dodo?

HILLCRIST *nods.* JILL *looks over at* ROLF, *whose face is grimly set.* CHLOE *has never moved.* MRS HILLCRIST *whispers to her husband.*

AUCTIONEER. Five thousand eight hundred bid. For five thousand eight hundred. Come along, gen'lemen, come along. We're not beaten. Thank you, sir. [HORNBLOWER] Five thousand nine hundred. And—? [DAWKER] Six thousand. Six thousand bid. Six thousand bid. For six thousand! The Centry—most desirable spot in the county—going for the low price of six thousand.

HILLCRIST. [*Muttering*] Low! Heavens!

AUCTIONEER. Any advance on six thousand?

Come, gen'lemen, we haven't dried up? A little spirit. Six thousand? For six thousand? For six thousand pounds? Very well, I'm selling. For six thousand once—[*He taps*] For six thousand twice —[*He taps*].

JILL. [*Low*] Oh! we've got it!

AUCTIONEER. And one, sir? [HORNBLOWER] Six thousand one hundred bid.

The SOLICITOR *touches his arm and says something, to which the* AUCTIONEER *responds with a nod.*

MRS H. Blow your nose, Jack.

HILLCRIST *blows his nose.*

AUCTIONEER. For six thousand one hundred. [DAWKER] And two. Thank you. [HORNBLOWER] And three. For six thousand three hundred. [DAWKER] And four. For six thousand four hundred pounds. This coveted property. For six thousand four hundred pounds. Why, it's giving it away, gen'lemen. [*A pause*].

MRS H. Giving!

AUCTIONEER. Six thousand four hundred bid. [HORNBLOWER] And five. [DAWKER] And six. [HORNBLOWER] And seven. [DAWKER] And eight.

A pause, during which, through the door Left, someone beckons to the SOLICITOR, *who rises and confers.*

HILLCRIST. [*Muttering*] I've done if that doesn't get it.

AUCTIONEER. For six thousand eight hundred. For six thousand eight hundred—once—[*He taps*]

twice—[*He taps*] For the last time. This dominating site. [HORNBLOWER] And nine. Thank you. For six thousand nine hundred.

HILLCRIST *has taken out his handkerchief.*

JILL. Oh! Dodo!

MRS H. [*Quivering*] Don't give in!

AUCTIONEER. Seven thousand may I say? [DAWKER] Seven thousand.

MRS H. [*Whispers*] Keep it down; don't show him.

AUCTIONEER. For seven thousand—going for seven thousand — once — [*Taps*] twice — [*Taps*] [HORNBLOWER] And one. Thank you, sir.

HILLCRIST *blows his nose.* JILL, *with a choke, leans back in her seat and folds her arms tightly on her chest.* MRS HILLCRIST *passes her handkerchief over her lips, sitting perfectly still.* HILLCRIST *too is motionless.*

The AUCTIONEER *has paused, and is talking to the* SOLICITOR, *who has returned to his seat.*

MRS H. Oh! Jack.

JILL. Stick it, Dodo; stick it!

AUCTIONEER. Now, gen'lemen, I have a bid of seven thousand one hundred for the Centry. And I'm instructed to sell if I can't get more. It's a fair price, but not a big price. [*To his friend* MR SPICER] A thumpin' price? [*With his smile*] Well, you're a judge of thumpin', I admit. Now, who'll give me seven thousand two hundred? What, no one? Well, I can't make you, gen'lemen. For seven

thousand one hundred. Once—[*Taps*] Twice—[*Taps*]. *Jill utters a little groan*

Hillcrist. [*Suddenly, in a queer voice*] Two.

Auctioneer. [*Turning with surprise and looking up to receive* Hillcrist's *nod*] Thank *you*, sir. And two. Seven thousand two hundred. [*He screws himself round so as to command both* Hillcrist *and* Hornblower] May I have yours, sir? [Hornblower] And three. [Hillcrist] And four. Seven thousand four hundred. For seven thousand four hundred. [Hornblower] Five. [Hillcrist] Six. For seven thousand six hundred. [*A pause*] Well, gen'lemen, this is better, but a record property shid fetch a record price. The possibilities are enormous. [Hornblower] Eight thousand did you say, sir? Eight thousand. Going for eight thousand pounds. [Hillcrist] And one. [Hornblower] And two. Hillcrist] And three. [Hornblower] And four. [Hillcrist] And five. For eight thousand five hundred. A wonderful property for eight thousand five hundred. *He wipes his brow.*

Jill. [*Whispering*] Oh, Dodo!

Mrs H. That's enough, Jack, we must stop some time.

Auctioneer. For eight thousand five hundred. Once—[*Taps*] Twice—[*Taps*] [Hornblower] Six hundred. [Hillcrist] Seven. May I have yours, sir? [Hornblower] Eight.

Hillcrist. Nine thousand.

Mrs Hillcrist *looks at him, biting her lips, but he is quite absorbed.*

AUCTIONEER. Nine thousand for this astounding property. Why, the Duke would pay that if he realised he'd be overlooked. Now, sir ? [*To* HORNBLOWER. *No response*]. Just a little raise on that. [*No response.*] For nine thousand. The Centry, Deepwater, for nine thousand. Once—[*Taps*] Twice—[*Taps*].

JILL. [*Under her breath*] Ours !

A VOICE. [*From far back in the centre*] And five hundred.

AUCTIONEER. [*Surprised and throwing out his arms towards the voice*] And five hundred. For nine thousand five hundred. May I have yours, sir ? [*He looks at* HORNBLOWER. *No response.*]

The SOLICITOR *speaks to him.*

MRS H. [*Whispering*] It must be the Duke again.

HILLCRIST. [*Passing his hand over his brow*] That's stopped him, any way.

AUCTIONEER. [*Looking at* HILLCRIST] For nine thousand five hundred ?

HILLCRIST *shakes his head.*

Once more. The Centry, Deepwater, for nine thousand five hundred. Once—[*Taps*] Twice—[*Taps*] [*He pauses and looks again at* HORNBLOWER *and* HILLCRIST] For the last time—at nine thousand five hundred. [*Taps*] [*With a look towards the bidder*] Mr Smalley. Well ! [*With great satisfaction*] That's that ! No more to-day, gen'lemen.

The AUCTIONEER *and* SOLICITOR *busy themselves. The room begins to empty.*

MRS H. Smalley ? Smalley ? *Is* that the Duke's agent ? Jack !

HILLCRIST. [*Coming out of a sort of coma, after the excitement he has been going through*] What ! What !

JILL. Oh, Dodo ! How splendidly you stuck it !

HILLCRIST. Phew ! What a squeak ! I was clean out of my depth. A mercy the Duke chipped in again.

MRS H. [*Looking at* ROLF *and* CHLOE, *who are standing up as if about to go*] Take care ; they can hear you. Find Dawker, Jack.

Below, the AUCTIONEER *and* SOLICITOR *take up their papers, and move out Left.*

HILLCRIST *stretches himself, standing up, as if to throw off the strain. The door behind is opened, and* HORNBLOWER *appears.*

HORNBLOWER. Ye ran me up a pretty price. Ye bid very pluckily, Hillcrist. But ye didn't quite get my measure.

HILLCRIST. Oh ! It was *my* nine thousand the Duke capped. Thank God, the Centry's gone to a gentleman !

HORNBLOWER. The Duke ? [*He laughs*] No, the Centry's not gone to a gentleman, nor to a fool. It's gone to me.

HILLCRIST. What !

HORNBLOWER. I'm sorry for ye ; ye're not fit to manage these things. Well, it's a monstrous price, and I've had to pay it because of your obstinacy. I shan't forget that when I come to build.

HILLCRIST. D'you mean to say that bid was for you ?

HORNBLOWER. Of course I do. I told ye I was a bad man to be up against. Perhaps ye'll believe me now.

HILLCRIST. A dastardly trick!

HORNBLOWER. [*With venom*] What did ye call it —a skin game? Remember we're playin' a skin game, Hillcrist.

HILLCRIST. [*Clenching his fists*] If we were younger men——

HORNBLOWER. Ay! 'Twouldn't look pretty for us to be at fisticuffs. We'll leave the fightin' to the young ones. [*He glances at* ROLF *and* JILL; *suddenly throwing out his finger at* ROLF] No makin' up to that young woman! I've watched ye. And as for you, missy, you leave my boy alone.

JILL. [*With suppressed passion*] Dodo, may I spit in his eye or something?

HILLCRIST. Sit down.

JILL *sits down. He stands between her and* HORNBLOWER.

You've won this round, sir, by a foul blow. We shall see whether you can take any advantage of it. I believe the law can stop you ruining my property.

HORNBLOWER. Make your mind easy; it can't. I've got ye in a noose, and I'm goin' to hang ye.

MRS H. [*Suddenly*] Mr Hornblower, as you fight foul—so shall we.

HILLCRIST. Amy!

MRS H. [*Paying no attention*] And it will not be foul play towards you and yours. You are outside the pale.

HORNBLOWER. That's just where I am, outside *your* pale all round ye. Ye're not long for Deepwater, ma'am. Make your dispositions to go; ye'll be out in six months, I prophesy. And good riddance to the neighbourhood.

They are all down on the level now.

CHLOE. [*Suddenly coming closer to* MRS HILLCRIST] Here are your salts, thank you. Father, can't you—?

HORNBLOWER. [*Surprised*] Can't I what?

CHLOE. Can't you come to an arrangement?

MRS H. Just so, Mr Hornblower. Can't you?

HORNBLOWER. [*Looking from one to the other*] As we're speakin' out, ma'am, it's your behaviour to my daughter-in-law—who's as good as you—and better, to my thinking—that's more than half the reason why I've bought this property. Ye've fair got my dander up. Now it's no use to bandy words. It's very forgivin' of ye, Chloe, but come along!

MRS H. Quite seriously, Mr Hornblower, you had better come to an arrangement.

HORNBLOWER. Mrs Hillcrist, ladies should keep to their own business.

MRS H. I will.

HILLCRIST. Amy, do leave it to us men. You young man [*He speaks to* ROLF] do you support your father's trick this afternoon?

JILL *looks round at* ROLF, *who tries to speak, when* HORNBLOWER *breaks in.*

HORNBLOWER. *My* trick? And what d'ye call it, to try and put me own son against me?

JILL. [*To* ROLF] Well ?

ROLF. I don't, but——

HORNBLOWER. Trick ? Ye young cub, be quiet. Mr Hillcrist had an agent bid for him—I had an agent bid for me. Only his agent bid at the beginnin', an' mine bid at the end. What's the trick in that ? [*He laughs*]

HILLCRIST. Hopeless ; we're in different worlds.

HORNBLOWER. I wish to God we were ! Come you, Chloe. And you, Rolf, you follow. In six months I'll have those chimneys up, and me lorries runnin' round ye.

MRS H. Mr Hornblower, if you build——

HORNBLOWER .[*Looking at* MRS HILLCRIST] Ye know—it's laughable. Ye make me pay nine thousand five hundred for a bit o' land not worth four, and ye think I'm not to get back on ye. I'm goin' on with as little consideration as if ye were a family of blackbeetles. Good afternoon !

ROLF. Father !

JILL. Oh, Dodo ! He's obscene.

HILLCRIST. Mr Hornblower, my compliments.

HORNBLOWER, *with a stare at* HILLCRIST'S *half-smiling face, takes* CHLOE'S *arm, and half drags her towards the door on the Left. But there, in the opened doorway, are standing* DAWKER *and a* STRANGER. *They move just out of the way of the exit, looking at* CHLOE, *who sways and very nearly falls.*

HORNBLOWER. Why ! Chloe ! What's the matter ?

CHLOE. I don't know; I'm not well to-day [*She pulls herself together with a great effort*].

MRS H. [*Who has exchanged a nod with* DAWKER *and the* STRANGER] Mr Hornblower, you build at your peril. I warn you.

HORNBLOWER. [*Turning round to speak*] Ye think yourself very cool and very smart. But I doubt this is the first time ye've been up against realities. Now, I've been up against them all my life. Don't talk to me, ma'am, about peril and that sort of nonsense; it makes no impression. Your husband called me pachydermatous. I don't know Greek, and Latin, and all that, but I've looked it out in the dictionary, and I find it means thick-skinned. And I'm none the worse for that when I have to deal with folk like you. Good afternoon.

He draws CHLOE *forward, and they pass through the door, followed quickly by* ROLF.

MRS H. Thank you, Dawker.

She moves up to DAWKER *and the* STRANGER, *Left, and they talk.*

JILL. Dodo! It's awful!

HILLCRIST. Well, there's nothing for it now but to smile and pay up. Poor old home! It shall be his wash-pot. Over the Centry will he cast his shoe. By Gad, Jill, I could cry!

JILL. [*pointing*] Look! Chloe's sitting down. She nearly fainted just now. It's something to do with Dawker, Dodo, and that man with him. Look at mother! Ask them!

HILLCRIST. Dawker!

DAWKER *comes to him, followed by* MRS HILLCRIST.

What's the mystery about young Mrs Hornblower ?

DAWKER. No mystery.

HILLCRIST. Well, what is it ?

MRS H. You'd better not ask.

HILLCRIST. I wish to know.

MRS H. Jill, go out and wait for us.

JILL. Nonsense, mother !

MRS H. It's not for a girl to hear.

JILL. Bosh ! I read the papers every day.

DAWKER. It's nothin' worse than you get there, anyway.

MRS H. Do you wish your daughter——

JILL. It's ridiculous, Dodo ; you'd think I was mother at my age.

MRS H. I was not so proud of my knowledge.

JILL. No, but you had it, dear.

HILLCRIST. What is it—what is it ? Come over here, Dawker.

DAWKER *goes to him, Right, and speaks in a low voice.*

What !

Again DAWKER *speaks in a low voice.*

Good God !

MRS H. Exactly !

JILL. Poor thing—whatever it is !

MRS H. Poor thing ?

JILL. What went before, mother ?

MRS H. It's what's coming after that matters, luckily.

HILLCRIST. How do you know this ?

DAWKER. My friend here [*He points to the* STRANGER] was one of the agents.

HILLCRIST. It's shocking. I'm sorry I heard it.

MRS H. I told you not to.

HILLCRIST. Ask your friend to come here.

DAWKER *beckons, and the* STRANGER *joins the group.*

Are you sure of what you've said, sir ?

STRANGER. Perfectly. I remember her quite well ; her name then was——

HILLCRIST. I don't want to know, thank you. I'm truly sorry. I wouldn't wish the knowledge of that about his womenfolk to my worst enemy. This mustn't be spoken of.

JILL *hugs his arm.*

MRS H. It will not be if Mr Hornblower is wise. If he is not wise, it must be spoken of.

HILLCRIST. I say no, Amy. I won't have it. It's a dirty weapon. Who touches pitch shall be defiled.

MRS H. Well, what weapons does he use against us ? Don't be quixotic. For all we can tell, they know it quite well already, and if they don't they ought to. Anyway, to know this is our salvation, and we must use it.

JILL. [*Sotto voce*] Pitch ! Dodo ! Pitch !

DAWKER. The threat's enough ! J.P.—Chapel—Future member for the constituency——

HILLCRIST. [*A little more doubtfully*] To use a piece of knowledge about a woman—it's repugnant. I—I won't do it.

MRS H. If you had a son tricked into marrying such a woman, would you wish to remain ignorant of it?

HILLCRIST. [*Struck*] I don't know—I don't know.

MRS H. At least you'd like to be in a position to help him, if you thought it necessary?

HILLCRIST. Well—that—perhaps.

MRS H. Then you agree that Mr Hornblower at least should be told. What he does with the knowledge is not our affair.

HILLCRIST. [*Half to the* STRANGER *and half to* DAWKER] Do you realise that an imputation of that kind may be ground for a criminal libel action?

STRANGER. Quite. But there's no shadow of doubt; not the faintest. You saw her just now?

HILLCRIST. I did. [*Revolting again*] No; I don't like it.

DAWKER *has drawn the* STRANGER *a step or two away, and they talk together.*

MRS H. [*In a low voice*] And the ruin of our home? You're betraying your fathers, Jack.

HILLCRIST. I can't bear bringing a woman into it.

MRS H. We don't. If anyone brings her in, it will be Hornblower himself.

HILLCRIST. We use her secret as a lever.

MRS H. I tell you quite plainly: I will only consent to holding my tongue about her, if you agree to Hornblower being told. It's a scandal to have a woman like that in the neighbourhood.

JILL. Mother means that, father.

HILLCRIST. Jill, keep quiet. This is a very bitter position. I can't tell what to do.

MRS H. You must use this knowledge. You owe it to me—to us all. You'll see that when you've thought it over.

JILL. [*Softly*] Pitch, Dodo, pitch !

MRS H. [*Furiously*] Jill, be quiet !

HILLCRIST. I was brought up never to hurt a woman. I can't do it, Amy—I can't do it. I should never feel like a gentleman again.

MRS H. [*Coldly*] Oh ! Very well.

HILLCRIST. What d'you mean by that ?

MRS H. I shall use the knowledge in my own way.

HILLCRIST. [*Staring at her*] You would—against my wishes ?

MRS H. I consider it my duty.

HILLCRIST. If I agree to Hornblower being told——

MRS H. That's all I want.

HILLCRIST. It's the utmost I'll consent to, Amy ; and don't let's have any humbug about its being morally necessary. We do it to save our skins.

MRS H. I don't know what you mean by humbug ?

JILL. He means humbug, mother.

HILLCRIST. It must stop at old Hornblower. Do you quite understand ?

MRS H. Quite.

JILL. Will it stop ?

MRS H. Jill, if you can't keep your impertinence to yourself——

HILLCRIST. Jill, come with me.

He turns towards door, Back.

JILL. I'm sorry, mother. Only it *is* a skin game, isn't it ?

MRS H. You pride yourself on plain speech, Jill. I pride myself on plain thought. You will thank me afterwards that I can see realities. I know we are better people than these Hornblowers. Here we are going to stay, and they—are not.

JILL. [*Looking at her with a sort of unwilling admiration*] Mother, you're wonderful!

HILLCRIST. Jill!

JILL. Coming, Dodo.

She turns and runs to the door. They go out. MRS HILLCRIST, *with a long sigh, draws herself up, fine and proud.*

MRS H. Dawker!

He comes to her.

I shall send him a note to-night, and word it so that he will be bound to come and see us to-morrow morning. Will you be in the study just before eleven o'clock, with this gentleman?

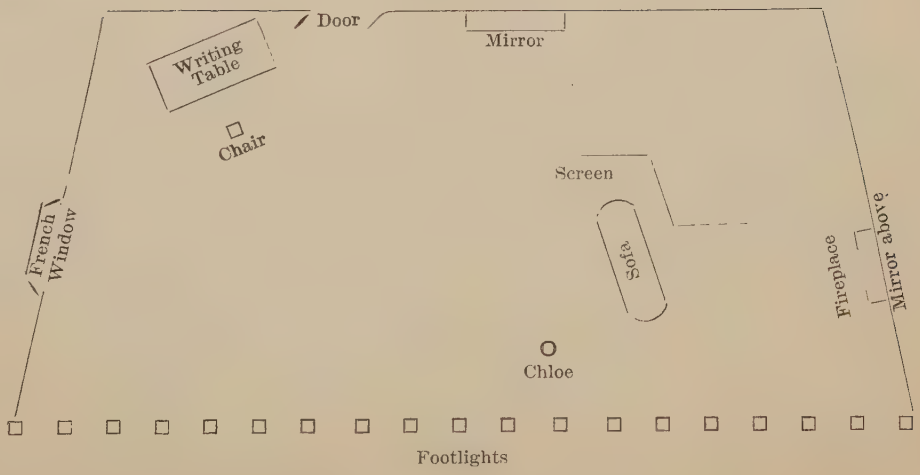
DAWKER. [*Nodding*] We're going to wire for his partner. I'll bring him too. Can't make too sure.

She goes firmly up the steps and out.

DAWKER. [*To the* STRANGER, *with a wink*] The Squire's squeamish—too much of a gentleman. But he don't count. The grey mare's all right. You wire to Henry. I'm off to our solicitors. We'll make that old rhinoceros sell us back the Centry at a decent price. These Hornblowers—[*Laying his finger on his nose*] We've got 'em!

CURTAIN

ACT II. Scene II.



SCENE II

CHLOE'S *boudoir at half-past seven the same evening. A pretty room. No pictures on the walls, but two mirrors. A screen and a luxurious couch on the fireplace side, stage Left. A door rather Right of Centre Back, opening inwards. A French window, Right forward. A writing table, Right Back. Electric light burning.*

CHLOE, *in a tea-gown, is standing by the forward end of the sofa, very still, and very pale. Her lips are parted, and her large eyes stare straight before them as if seeing ghosts. The door is opened noiselessly and a* WOMAN'S *face is seen. It peers at* CHLOE, *vanishes, and the door is closed.* CHLOE *raises her hands, covers her eyes with them, drops them with a quick gesture, and looks round her. A knock. With a swift movement she slides on to the sofa, and lies prostrate, with eyes closed.*

CHLOE. [*Feebly*] Come in!

Her MAID *enters; a trim, contained figure of uncertain years, in a black dress, with the face which was peering in.*

Yes, Anna?

ANNA. Aren't you going in to dinner, ma'am?

CHLOE. [*With closed eyes*] No.

ANNA. Will you take anything here, ma'am?

CHLOE. I'd like a biscuit and a glass of champagne.

The MAID, *who is standing between sofa and door, smiles.* CHLOE, *with a swift look, catches the smile.*

Why do you smile ?

ANNA. Was I, ma'am ?

CHLOE. You know you were. [*Fiercely*] Are you paid to smile at me ?

ANNA. [*Immovable*] No, ma'am. Would you like some eau de Cologne on your forehead ?

CHLOE. Yes.—No.—What's the good ? [*Clasping her forehead*] My headache won't go.

ANNA. To keep lying down's the best thing for it.

CHLOE. I have been—hours.

ANNA. [*With the smile*] Yes, ma'am.

CHLOE. [*Gathering herself up on the sofa*] Anna ! Why do you do it ?

ANNA. Do what, ma'am ?

CHLOE. Spy on me.

ANNA. I—never ! I— !

CHLOE. To spy ! You're a fool, too. What is there to spy on ?

ANNA. Nothing, ma'am. Of course, if you're not satisfied with me, I must give notice. Only—if I were spying, I should expect to have notice given me. I've been accustomed to ladies who wouldn't stand such a thing for a minute.

CHLOE. [*Intently*] Well, you'll take a month's wages and go to-morrow. And that's all, now.

ANNA *inclines her head and goes out.*

CHLOE, *with a sort of moan turns over and buries her face in the cushion.*

CHLOE. [*Sitting up*] If I could see that man—if only—or Dawker——

She springs up and goes to the door, but hesitates, and comes back to the head of the sofa, as ROLF *comes in. During this scene the door is again opened stealthily, an inch or two.*

ROLF. How's the head ?

CHLOE. Beastly, thanks. I'm not going in to dinner.

ROLF. Is there anything I can do for you ?

CHLOE. No, dear boy. [*Suddenly looking at him*] You don't want this quarrel with the Hillcrists to go on, do you, Rolf ?

ROLF. No ; I hate it.

CHLOE. Well, I think I *might* be able to stop it. Will you slip round to Dawker's—it's not five minutes —and ask him to come and see me.

ROLF. Father and Charlie wouldn't——

CHLOE. I know. But if he comes to the window here while you're at dinner, I'll let him in, and out, and nobody'd know.

ROLF. [*Astonished*] Yes, but what—I mean how——

CHLOE. Don't ask me. It's worth the shot—that's all. [*Looking at her wrist-watch*] To this window at eight o'clock exactly. First long window on the terrace, tell him.

ROLF. It's nothing Charlie would mind ?

CHLOE. No; only I can't tell him—he and father are so mad about it all.

ROLF. If there's a real chance——

CHLOE. [*Going to the window and opening it*] This way, Rolf. If you don't come back I shall know he's coming. Put your watch by mine. [*Looking at his watch*] It's a minute fast, see!

ROLF. Look here, Chloe——

CHLOE. Don't wait; go on.

She almost pushes him out through the window, closes it after him, draws the curtains again, stands a minute, thinking hard; goes to the bell and rings it; then, crossing to the writing table, Right Back, she takes out a chemist's prescription.

ANNA *comes in.*

CHLOE. I don't want that champagne. Take this to the chemist and get him to make up some of these cachets quick, and bring them back yourself.

ANNA. Yes, ma'am; but you have some.

CHLOE. They're too old; I've taken two—the strength's out of them. Quick, please; I can't stand this head.

ANNA. [*Taking the prescription—with her smile*] Yes, ma'am. It'll take some time—you don't want me?

CHLOE. No; I want the cachets.

ANNA *goes out.*

CHLOE *looks at her wrist-watch, goes to the writing-table, which is old-fashioned, with a secret drawer, looks round her, dives at the*

secret drawer, takes out a roll of notes and a tissue paper parcel. She counts the notes : "*Three hundred.*" *Slips them into her breast and unwraps the little parcel. It contains pearls. She slips them too into her dress, looks round startled, replaces the drawer, and regains her place on the sofa, lying prostrate as the door opens, and* HORNBLOWER *comes in. She does not open her eyes, and he stands looking at her a moment before speaking.*

HORNBLOWER. [*Almost softly*] How are ye feelin', Chloe ?

CHLOE. Awful head !

HORNBLOWER. Can ye attend a moment ? I've had a note from that woman. CHLOE *sits up.*

HORNBLOWER. [*Reading*] "I have something of the utmost importance to tell you in regard to your daughter-in-law. I shall be waiting to see you at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. The matter is so utterly vital to the happiness of all your family, that I cannot imagine you will fail to come." Now, what's the meaning of it ? Is it sheer impudence, or lunacy, or what ?

CHLOE. I don't know.

HORNBLOWER. [*Not unkindly*] Chloe, if there's anything—ye'd better tell me. Forewarned's forearmed.

CHLOE. There's nothing ; unless it's—[*With a quick look at him*]—Unless it's that my father was a—a bankrupt.

HORNBLOWER. Hech! Many a man's been that. Ye've never told us much about your family.

CHLOE. I wasn't very proud of him.

HORNBLOWER. Well, ye're not responsible for your father. If that's all, it's a relief. The bitter snobs! I'll remember it in the account I've got with them.

CHLOE. Father, don't say anything to Charlie; it'll only worry him for nothing.

HORNBLOWER. Na, no, I'll not. If *I* went bankrupt, it'd upset Chearlie, I've not a doubt. [*He laughs. Looking at her shrewdly*] There's nothing else, before I answer her?

CHLOE *shakes her head.*

Ye're sure?

CHLOE. [*With an effort*] She may invent things, of course.

HORNBLOWER. [*Lost in his feud feeling*] Ah! but there's such a thing as the laws o' slander. If they play pranks, I'll have them up for it.

CHLOE. [*Timidly*] Couldn't you stop this quarrel, father? You said it was on my account. But *I* don't want to know them. And they do love their old home. I like the girl. You don't really need to build just there, do you? Couldn't you stop it? Do!

HORNBLOWER. Stop it? Now I've bought? Na, no! The snobs defied me, and I'm going to show them. I hate the lot of them, and I hate that little Dawker worst of all.

CHLOE. He's only their agent.

HORNBLOWER. He's a part of the whole dog-in-

the-manger system that stands in my way. Ye're a woman, and ye don't understand these things. Ye wouldn't believe the struggle I've had to make my money and get my position. These county folk talk soft sawder, but to get anything from them's like gettin' butter out of a dog's mouth. If they could drive me out of here by fair means or foul, would they hesitate a moment? Not they! See what they've made me pay; and look at this letter. Selfish, mean lot o' hypocrites!

CHLOE. But they didn't begin the quarrel.

HORNBLOWER. Not openly; but underneath they did—that's their way. They began it by thwartin' me here and there and everywhere, just because I've come into me own a bit later than they did. I gave 'em their chance, and they wouldn't take it. Well, I'll show 'em what a man like me can do when he sets his mind to it. I'll not leave much skin on them.

In the intensity of his feeling he has lost sight of her face, alive with a sort of agony of doubt, whether to plead with him further, or what to do. Then, with a swift glance at her wrist-watch, she falls back on the sofa and closes her eyes.

It'll give me a power of enjoyment seein' me chimneys go up in front of their windies. That was a bonnie thought—that last bid o' mine. He'd got that roused up, I believe he never would a' stopped. [*Looking at her*] I forgot your head. Well, well, ye'll be best lyin' quiet.

The gong sounds.

Shall we send ye something in from dinner ?

CHLOE. No ; I'll try to sleep. Please tell them I don't want to be disturbed.

HORNBLOWER. All right. I'll just answer this note.

He sits down at her writing-table.

CHLOE *starts up from the sofa feverishly, looking at her watch, at the window, at her watch ; then softly crosses to the window and opens it.*

HORNBLOWER. [*Finishing*] Listen ! [*He turns round towards the sofa*] Hallo ! Where are ye ?

CHLOE. [*At the window*] It's so hot.

HORNBLOWER. Here's what I've said :

> " MADAM,—You can tell me nothing of my daughter-in-law which can affect the happiness of my family. I regard your note as an impertinence, and I shall not be with you at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning.
>
> " Yours truly—— "

CHLOE. [*With a suffering movement of her head*] Oh ! —Well !——

The gong is touched a second time.

HORNBLOWER. [*Crossing to the door*] Lie ye down, and get a sleep. I'll tell them not to disturb ye ; and I hope ye'll be all right to-morrow. Good-night, Chloe.

CHLOE. Good-night. *He goes out.*

After a feverish turn or two, CHLOE *returns to*

the open window and waits there, half screened by the curtains. The door is opened inch by inch, and ANNA'S *head peers round. Seeing where* CHLOE *is, she slips in and passes behind the screen, Left. Suddenly* CHLOE *backs in from the window.*

CHLOE. [*In a low voice*] Come in.

She darts to the door and locks it.

DAWKER *has come in through the window and stands regarding her with a half smile.*

DAWKER. Well, young woman, what do you want of me ?

In the presence of this man of her own class, there comes a distinct change in CHLOE'S *voice and manner ; a sort of frank commonness, adapted to the man she is dealing with. but she keeps her voice low.*

CHLOE. You're making a mistake, you know.

DAWKER. [*With a broad grin*] No. I've got a memory for faces.

CHLOE. I say you are.

DAWKER. [*Turning to go*] If that's all, you needn't 'ave troubled me to come.

CHLOE. No. Don't go ! [*With a faint smile*] You *are* playing a game with me. Aren't you ashamed ? What harm have I done you ? Do you call this cricket ?

DAWKER. No, my girl—business.

CHLOE. [*Bitterly*] What have I to do with this quarrel ? I couldn't help their falling out.

DAWKER. That's your misfortune.

CHLOE. [*Clasping her hands*] You're a cruel fellow if you can spoil a woman's life who never did you an ounce of harm.

DAWKER. So they *don't* know about you. That's all right. Now, look here, I serve my employer. But I'm flesh and blood too, and I always give as good as I get. I hate this family of yours. There's no name too bad for 'em to call me this last month, and no looks too black to give me. I tell you frankly, I hate 'em.

CHLOE. There's good in them same as in you.

DAWKER. [*With a grin*] There's no good Hornblower but a dead Hornblower.

CHLOE. But—but I'm *not* one.

DAWKER. You'll be the mother of some, I shouldn't wonder.

CHLOE. [*Stretching out her hand—pathetically*] Oh! leave me alone, do! I'm happy here. Be a sport! Be a sport!

DAWKER. [*Disconcerted for a second*] You can't get at me, so don't try it on.

CHLOE. I had such a bad time in old days.

DAWKER *shakes his head; his grin has disappeared and his face is like wood.*

CHLOE. [*Panting*] Ah! do! You might! You've been fond of some woman, I suppose. Think of her!

DAWKER. [*Decisively*] It won't do, Mrs Chloe. You're a pawn in the game, and I'm going to use you.

CHLOE. [*Despairingly*] What is it to you? [*With a sudden touch of the tigress*] Look here! Don't you make an enemy of me. I haven't dragged through hell for nothing. Women like me can bite, I tell you.

DAWKER. That's better. I'd rather have a woman threaten than whine, any day. Threaten away! You'll let 'em know that you met me in the Promenade one night. Of course you'll let 'em know that, won't you?—or that——

CHLOE. Be quiet! Oh! Be quiet! [*Taking from her bosom the notes and the pearls*] Look! There's my savings—there's all I've got! The pearls'll fetch nearly a thousand. [*Holding it out to him*] Take it, and drop me out—won't you? Won't you?

DAWKER. [*Passing his tongue over his lips—with a hard little laugh*] You mistake your man, missis. I'm a plain dog, if you like, but I'm faithful, and I hold fast. Don't try those games on me.

CHLOE. [*Losing control*] You're a beast!—a beast! a cruel, cowardly beast! And how dare you bribe that woman here to spy on me? Oh! yes, you do; you know you do. If you drove me mad, you wouldn't care. You beast!

DAWKER. Now, don't carry on! That won't help you.

CHLOE. What d'you call it—to dog a woman down like this, just because you happen to have a quarrel with a man?

DAWKER. Who made the quarrel? Not me, missis. *You* ought to know that in a row it's the weak and helpless—we won't say the innocent—that get it in the neck. That can't be helped.

CHLOE. [*Regarding him intently*] I hope your mother or your sister, if you've got any, may go through what I'm going through ever since you got

on my track. I hope they'll know what fear means. I hope they'll love and find out that it's hanging on a thread, and—and—— Oh! you coward, you persecuting coward! Call yourself a man!

DAWKER. [*With his grin*] Ah! You look quite pretty like that. By George! you're a handsome woman when you're roused.

CHLOE'S *passion fades out as quickly as it blazed up. She sinks down on the sofa, shudders, looks here and there, and then for a moment up at him.*

CHLOE. Is there *anything* you'll take, not to spoil my life? [*Clasping her hands on her breast; under her breath*] Me?

DAWKER. [*Wiping his brow*] By God! That's an offer. [*He recoils towards the window*] You—you touched me there. Look here! I've got to use you and I'm going to use you, but I'll do my best to let you down as easy as I can. No, I don't want anything you can give me—that is—[*He wipes his brow again*] I'd like it—but I won't take it.

CHLOE *buries her face in her hands.*

There! Keep your pecker up; don't cry. Good-night! *He goes through the window.*

CHLOE. [*Springing up*] Ugh! Rat in a trap! Rat——!

She stands listening; flies to the door, unlocks it, and, going back to the sofa, lies down and closes her eyes. CHARLES *comes in very quietly and stands over her, looking to see if she is asleep. She opens her eyes.*

CHARLES. Well, Clo! Had a sleep, old girl?

CHLOE. Ye—es.

CHARLES. [*Sitting on the arm of the sofa and caressing her*] Feel better, dear?

CHLOE. Yes, better, Charlie.

CHARLES. That's right. Would you like some soup?

CHLOE. [*With a shudder*] No.

CHARLES. I say—what gives you these heads? You've been very on and off all this last month.

CHLOE. I don't know. Except that—except that I *am* going to have a child, Charlie.

CHARLES. After all! By Jove! Sure?

CHLOE. [*Nodding*] Are you glad?

CHARLES. Well—I suppose I am. The guv'nor will be mighty pleased, anyway.

CHLOE. Don't tell him—yet.

CHARLES. All right! [*Bending over and drawing her to him*] My poor girl, I'm so sorry you're seedy. Give us a kiss.

CHLOE *puts up her face and kisses him passionately.*

I say, you're like fire. You're not feverish?

CHLOE. [*With a laugh*] It's a wonder if I'm not. Charlie, are you happy with me?

CHARLES. What do you think?

CHLOE. [*Leaning against him*] You wouldn't easily believe things against me, would you?

CHARLES. What! Thinking of those Hillcrists? What the hell that woman means by her attitude towards you—— When I saw her there to-day, I had

all my work cut out not to go up and give her a bit of my mind.

CHLOE. [*Watching him stealthily*] It's not good for me, now I'm like this. It's upsetting me, Charlie.

CHARLES. Yes ; and we won't forget. We'll make 'em pay for it.

CHLOE. It's wretched in a little place like this. I say, must you go on spoiling their home ?

CHARLES. The woman cuts you and insults you. That's enough for me.

CHLOE. [*Timidly*] Let her. *I* don't care ; I can't bear feeling enemies about, Charlie, I—get nervous—I——

CHARLES. My dear girl ! What is it ? [*He looks at her intently*].

CHLOE. I suppose it's—being like this. [*Suddenly*] But, Charlie, do stop it for my sake. Do, do !

CHARLES. [*Patting her arm*] Come, come ; I say, Chloe ! You're making mountains. See things in proportion. Father's paid nine thousand five hundred to get the better of those people, and you want him to chuck it away to save a woman who's insulted you. That's not sense, and it's not business. Have some pride.

CHLOE. [*Breathless*] I've got no pride, Charlie. I want to be quiet—that's all.

CHARLES. Well, if the row gets on your nerves, I can take you to the sea. But you ought to enjoy a fight with people like that.

CHLOE. [*With calculated bitterness*] No, it's nothing, of course—what *I* want.

CHARLES. Hallo! Hallo! You *are* on the jump!

CHLOE. If you want me to be a good wife to you, make father stop it.

CHARLES. [*Standing up*] Now, look here, Chloe, what's behind this?

CHLOE. [*Faintly*] Behind?

CHARLES. You're carrying on as if—as if you were really scared! We've *got* these people. We'll have them out of Deepwater in six months. It's absolute ruination to their beastly old house; we'll put the chimneys on the very edge, not three hundred yards off, and our smoke'll be drifting over them half the time. You won't have this confounded stuck-up woman here much longer. And then we can really go ahead and take our proper place. So long as she's here, we shall never do that. We've only to drive on now as fast as we can.

CHLOE. [*With a gesture*] I see.

CHARLES. [*Again looking at her*] If you go on like this, you know, I shall begin to think there's something you——

CHLOE [*softly*] Charlie!

He comes to her.

Love me!

CHARLES. [*Embracing her*] There, old girl! I know women are funny at these times. You want a good night, that's all.

CHLOE. You haven't finished dinner, have you? Go back, and I'll go to bed quite soon. Charli don't stop loving me.

CHARLES. Stop ? Not much.

While he is again embracing her, ANNA *steals from behind the screen to the door, opens it noiselessly, and passes through, but it clicks as she shuts it.*

CHLOE. [*Starting violently*] Oh—h !

CHARLES. What is it ? What is it ? You are nervy, my dear.

CHLOE. [*Looking round with a little laugh*] I don't know. Go on Charlie. I'll be all right when this head's gone.

CHARLES. [*Stroking her forehead and looking at her doubtfully*] You go to bed ; I won't be late coming up.

He turns and goes, blowing a kiss from the doorway. When he is gone, CHLOE *gets up and stands in precisely the attitude in which she stood at the beginning of the Act, thinking, and thinking. And the door is opened, and the face of the* MAID *peers round at her.*

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

SCENE I

MORNING

HILLCRIST'S *study next morning.*

JILL, *coming from Left, looks in at the open French window.*

JILL. [*Speaking to* ROLF, *invisible*] Come in here. There's no one.

She goes in. ROLF *joins her, coming from the garden.*

ROLF. Jill, I just wanted to say—Need we ?

JILL *nods.*

Seeing you yesterday—it did seem rotten.

JILL. *We* didn't begin it.

ROLF. No ; but you don't understand. If you'd made yourself, as father has——

JILL. I hope I should be sorry.

ROLF. [*Reproachfully*] That isn't like you. Really he can't help thinking he's a public benefactor.

JILL. And we can't help thinking he's a pig. Sorry !

ROLF. If the survival of the fittest is right——

JILL. He may be fitter, but he's not going to survive.

ROLF. [*Distracted*] It looks like it though.

JILL. Is that all you came to say ?

ROLF. No. Suppose we joined, couldn't we stop it ?

JILL. I don't feel like joining.

ROLF. We *did* shake hands.

JILL. One can't fight and not grow bitter.

ROLF. *I* don't feel bitter.

JILL. Wait ; you'll feel it soon enough.

ROLF. Why ? [*Attentively*] About Chloe ? I do think your mother's manner to her is——

JILL. Well ?

ROLF. Snobbish. JILL *laughs.* She may not be your class ; and that's just why it's snobbish.

JILL. I think you'd better shut up.

ROLF. What my father said was true ; your mother's rudeness to her that day she came here, has made both him and Charlie ever so much more bitter.

JILL *whistles the Habanera from "Carmen."*

[*Staring at her, rather angrily*] Is it a whistling matter ?

JILL. No.

ROLF. I suppose you want me to go ?

JILL. Yes.

ROLF. All right. Aren't we ever going to be friends again ?

JILL. [*Looking steadily at him*] I don't expect so.

ROLF. That's very—horrible.

JILL. Lots of horrible things in the world.

ROLF. It's our business to make them fewer, Jill.

JILL. [*Fiercely*] Don't be moral.

ROLF. [*Hurt*] That's the last thing I want to be. I only want to be friendly.

JILL. Better be real first.

ROLF. From the big point of view——

JILL. There isn't any. We're all out for our own. And why not ?

ROLF. By jove, you have got——

JILL. Cynical ? Your father's motto—" Every man for himself." That's the winner—hands down. Good-bye !

ROLF. Jill ! Jill !

JILL. [*Putting her hands behind her back, hums*]—

" If auld acquaintance be forgot
And days of auld lang syne "——

ROLF. Don't !

With a pained gesture he goes out towards Left, through the French window.

JILL, *who has broken off the song, stands with her hands clenched and her lips quivering.*

FELLOWS *enters Left.*

FELLOWS. Mr Dawker, Miss, and two gentlemen.

JILL. Let the three gentlemen in, and me out.

She passes him and goes out Left.

And immediately DAWKER *and the* TWO STRANGERS *come in.*

FELLOWS. I'll inform Mrs Hillcrist, sir. The Squire is on his rounds. *He goes out Left.*

The THREE MEN *gather in a discreet knot at the big bureau, having glanced at the two doors and the open French window.*

DAWKER. Now this may come into Court, you know. If there's a screw loose anywhere, better mention it. [*To* SECOND STRANGER] You knew her personally ?

SECOND S. What do you think ? I don't take girls on trust for that sort of job. She came to us highly recommended, too ; and did her work very well. It was a double stunt—to make sure—wasn't it, George ?

FIRST S. Yes ; we paid her for the two visits.

SECOND S. I should know her in a minute ; striking looking girl ; had something in her face. Daresay she'd seen hard times.

FIRST S. We don't want publicity.

DAWKER. Not likely. The threat'll do it ; but the stakes are heavy—and the man's a slogger ; we must be able to push it home. If you can both swear to her, it'll do the trick.

SECOND S. And about—I mean, we're losing time, you know, coming down here.

DAWKER. [*With a nod at* FIRST STRANGER] George here knows me. That'll be all right. I'll guarantee it well worth your while.

SECOND S. I don't want to do the girl harm, if she's married.

DAWKER. No, no ; nobody wants to hurt *her*. We just want a cinch on this fellow till he squeals.

They separate a little as MRS HILLCRIST *enters from Right.*

DAWKER. Good morning, ma'am. My friend's partner. Hornblower coming ?

MRS H. At eleven. I had to send up a second note, Dawker.

DAWKER. Squire not in ?

MRS H. I haven't told him.

DAWKER. [*Nodding*] Our friends might go in here [*Pointing Right*] and we can use 'em as we want 'em.

MRS H. [*To the* STRANGERS] Will you make yourselves comfortable ?

She holds the door open, and they pass her into the room, Right.

DAWKER. [*Showing document*] I've had this drawn and engrossed. Pretty sharp work. Conveys the Centry, *and* Longmeadow, to the Squire at four thousand five hundred. Now, ma'am, suppose Hornblower puts his hand to that, he'll have been done in the eye, and six thousand all told out o' pocket. You'll have a very nasty neighbour here.

MRS H. But we shall still have the power to disclose that secret at any time.

DAWKER. Yeh ! But things might happen here you could never bring home to him. You can't trust a man like that. He isn't goin' to forgive *me*, I know.

MRS H. [*Regarding him keenly*] But if he signs, we couldn't honourably——

DAWKER. No, ma'am, *you* couldn't ; and I'm sure *I* don't want to do that girl a hurt. I just mention it because, of course, you can't guarantee that it doesn't get out.

MRS H. Not absolutely, I suppose.

A look passes between them, which neither of them has quite sanctioned.

There's his car. It always seems to make more noise than any other.

DAWKER. He'll kick and flounder—but you leave him to ask what you want, ma'am; don't mention this [*He puts the deed back into his pocket*]. The Centry's no mortal good to him if he's not going to put up works; I should say he'd be glad to save what he can.

MRS HILLCRIST *inclines her head.* FELLOWS *enters Left.*

FELLOWS. [*Apologetically*] Mr Hornblower, ma'am; by appointment, he says.

MRS H. Quite right, Fellows.

HORNBLOWER *comes in, and* FELLOWS *goes out.*

HORNBLOWER [*Without salutation*] I've come to ask ye point blank what ye mean by writing me these letters. [*He takes out two letters*] And we'll discuss it in the presence of nobody, if ye please.

MRS H. Mr Dawker knows all that I know, and more.

HORNBLOWER. Does he? Very well! Your second note says that my daughter-in-law has lied to me. Well, I've brought her, and what ye've got to say—if it's not just a trick to see me again—ye'll say to her face. [*He takes a step towards the window*]

MRS H. Mr Hornblower, you had better decide that after hearing what it is—we shall be quite ready to repeat it in her presence; but we want to do as little harm as possible.

HORNBLOWER. [*Stopping*] Oh! ye do! Well, what lies have ye been hearin'? Or what have ye

made up ? You and Mr Dawker ? Of course ye know there's a law of libel and slander. I'm not the man to stop at that.

MRS H. [*Calmly*] Are you familiar with the law of divorce, Mr Hornblower ?

HORNBLOWER. [*Taken aback*] No, I'm not. That is——

MRS H. Well, you know that misconduct is required. And I suppose you've heard that cases are arranged.

HORNBLOWER. I know it's all very shocking—what about it ?

MRS H. When cases are arranged, Mr Hornblower, the man who is to be divorced often visits an hotel with a strange woman. I am extremely sorry to say that your daughter-in-law, before her marriage, was in the habit of being employed as such a woman.

HORNBLOWER. Ye dreadful creature !

DAWKER. [*Quickly*] All proved, up to the hilt !

HORNBLOWER. I don't believe a word of it. Ye're lyin' to save your skins. How dare ye tell me such monstrosities ? Dawker, I'll have ye in a criminal court.

DAWKER. Rats ! You saw a gent with me yesterday ? Well, *he's* employed her.

HORNBLOWER. A put-up job ! Conspiracy !

MRS H. Go and get your daughter-in-law.

HORNBLOWER. [*With the first sensation of being in a net*] It's a foul shame—a lying slander !

MRS H. If so, it's easily disproved. Go and fetch her.

HORNBLOWER. [*Seeing them unmoved*] I will. I don't believe a word of it.

MRS H. I hope you are right.

HORNBLOWER *goes out by the French window.* DAWKER *slips to the door Right, opens it, and speaks to those within.* MRS HILLCRIST *stands moistening her lips, and passing her handkerchief over them.* HORNBLOWER *returns, preceding* CHLOE, *strung up to hardness and defiance.*

HORNBLOWER. Now then, let's have this impudent story torn to rags.

CHLOE. What story ?

HORNBLOWER. That you, my dear, were a woman —it's too shockin'—I don't know how to tell ye——

CHLOE. Go on !

HORNBLOWER. Were a woman that went with men, to get them their divorce.

CHLOE. Who says that ?

HORNBLOWER. That lady [*Sneering*] there, and her bull-terrier here.

CHLOE. [*Facing* MRS HILLCRIST] That's a charitable thing to say, isn't it ?

MRS H. Is it true ?

CHLOE. No.

HORNBLOWER. [*Furiously*] There ! I'll have ye both on your knees to her !

DAWKER. [*Opening the door Right*] Come in.

The FIRST STRANGER *comes in.* CHLOE, *with a visible effort, turns to face him.*

FIRST S. How do you do, Mrs Vane ?

CHLOE. I don't know you.

FIRST S. Your memory is bad, ma'am. You knew me yesterday well enough. One day is not a long time, nor are three years.

CHLOE. Who *are* you ?

FIRST S. Come, ma'am, come ! The Custer case.

CHLOE. I don't know you, I say. [*To* MRS HILLCRIST] How can you be so vile ?

FIRST S. Let me refresh your memory, ma'am. [*Producing a notebook*] Just on three years ago : " Oct. 3. To fee and expenses Mrs Vane with Mr C——, Hotel Beaulieu, Twenty pounds. Oct. 10, Do., Twenty pounds." [*To* HORNBLOWER] Would you like to glance at this book, sir ? You'll see they're genuine entries.

HORNBLOWER *makes a motion to do so, but checks himself and looks at* CHLOE.

CHLOE. [*Hysterically*] It's all lies—lies !

FIRST S. Come, ma'am, we wish you no harm.

CHLOE. Take me away. I won't be treated like this.

MRS H. [*In a low voice*] Confess.

CHLOE. Lies !

HORNBLOWER. Were ye ever called Vane ?

CHLOE. No, never.

She makes a movement towards the window, but DAWKER *is in the way, and she halts.*

FIRST S. [*Opening the door Right*] Henry.

The SECOND STRANGER *comes in quickly. At sight of him* CHLOE *throws up her hands, gasps, breaks down stage Left, and stands*

covering her face with her hands. It is so complete a confession that HORNBLOWER *stands staggered; and, taking out a coloured handkerchief, wipes his brow.*

DAWKER. Are you convinced?

HORNBLOWER. Take those men away.

DAWKER. If you're not satisfied, we can get other evidence; plenty.

HORNBLOWER. [*Looking at* CHLOE] That's enough. Take them out. Leave me alone with her.

DAWKER *takes them out Right.*

MRS HILLCRIST *passes* HORNBLOWER *and goes out at the window.* HORNBLOWER *moves down a step or two towards* CHLOE.

HORNBLOWER. My God!

CHLOE. [*With an outburst*] Don't tell Charlie! Don't tell Charlie!

HORNBLOWER. Chearlie! So that was your manner of life!

CHLOE *utters a moaning sound.*

So that's what ye got out of by marryin' into my family! Shame on ye, ye Godless thing!

CHLOE. Don't tell Charlie!

HORNBLOWER. And that's all ye can say for the wreck ye've wrought. My family, my works, my future! How dared ye!

CHLOE. If you'd been me!——

HORNBLOWER. An' these Hillcrists. The skin game of it!

CHLOE. [*Breathless*] Father!

HORNBLOWER. Don't call me that, woman!

CHLOE. [*Desperate*] I'm going to have a child.

HORNBLOWER. God! Ye are!

CHLOE. Your grandchild. For the sake of it, do what these people want; and don't tell anyone—*Don't tell Charlie!*

HORNBLOWER. [*Again wiping his forehead*] A secret between us. I don't know that I can keep it. It's horrible. Poor Chearlie!

CHLOE. [*Suddenly fierce*] You must keep it, you shall! I won't have him told. Don't make me desperate! I can be—I didn't live that life for nothing.

HORNBLOWER. [*Staring at her revealed in a new light*] Ay; ye look a strange, wild woman, as I see ye. And we thought the world of ye!

CHLOE. I love Charlie; I'm faithful to him. I can't live without him. You'll never forgive me, I know; but Charlie——! [*Stretching out her hands.*]

HORNBLOWER *makes a bewildered gesture with his large hands.*

HORNBLOWER. I'm all at sea here. Go out to the car and wait for me.

CHLOE *passes him and goes out, Left.*

[*Muttering to himself*] So I'm down! Me enemies put their heels upon me head! Ah! but we'll see yet!

He goes up to the window and beckons towards the Right.

MRS HILLCRIST *comes in.*

What d'ye want for this secret?

MRS H. Nothing.

HORNBLOWER. Indeed! Wonderful!—the trouble ye've taken for—nothing.

MRS H. If you harm us we shall harm you. Any use whatever of the Centry——

HORNBLOWER. For which ye made me pay nine thousand five hundred pounds.

MRS H. We will buy it from you.

HORNBLOWER. At what price?

MRS H. The Centry at the price Miss Mullins would have taken at first, and Longmeadow at the price you gave us—four thousand five hundred altogether.

HORNBLOWER. A fine price, and me six thousand out of pocket. Na, no! I'll keep it and hold it over ye. Ye daren't tell this secret so long as I've got it.

MRS H. No, Mr Hornblower. On second thoughts, you *must* sell. You broke your word over the Jackmans. We can't trust you. We would rather have our place here ruined at once, than leave you the power to ruin it as and when you like. You will sell us the Centry and Longmeadow now, or you know what will happen.

HORNBLOWER. [*Writhing*] I'll not. It's blackmail.

MRS H. Very well then! Go your own way and we'll go ours. There is no witness to this conversation.

HORNBLOWER. [*Venomously*] By heaven, ye're a clever woman. Will ye swear by Almighty God that you and your family, and that agent of yours, won't breathe a word of this shockin' thing to mortal soul.

MRS H. Yes, if you sell.

HORNBLOWER. Where's Dawker?

MRS H. [*Going to the door, Right*] Mr Dawker!

DAWKER *comes in.*

HORNBLOWER. I suppose ye've got your iniquity ready.

DAWKER *grins and produces the document.* It's mighty near conspiracy, this. Have ye got a Testament?

MRS H. My word will be enough, Mr Hornblower.

HORNBLOWER. Ye'll pardon me—I can't make it solemn enough for you.

MRS H. Very well; here is a Bible.

She takes a small Bible from the bookshelf.

DAWKER. [*Spreading document on bureau*] This is a short conveyance of the Centry and Longmeadow—recites sale to you by Miss Mullins of the first, John Hillcrist of the second, and whereas you have agreed for the sale to said John Hillcrist, for the sum of four thousand five hundred pounds, in consideration of the said sum, receipt whereof, you hereby acknowledge you do convey all that, etc. Sign here. I'll witness.

HORNBLOWER. [*To* MRS HILLCRIST] Take that Book in your hand, and swear first. I swear by Almighty God never to breathe a word of what I know concerning Chloe Hornblower to any living soul.

MRS H. No, Mr Hornblower; you will please sign first. *We* are not in the habit of breaking our words.

HORNBLOWER, *after a furious look at them, seizes a pen, runs his eye again over the deed, and signs,* DAWKER *witnessing.*

To that oath, Mr Hornblower, we shall add the words, "So long as the Hornblower family do us no harm."

HORNBLOWER. [*With a snarl*] Take it in your hands, both of ye, and together swear.

MRS H. [*Taking the Book*] I swear that I will breathe no word of what I know concerning Chloe Hornblower to any living soul, so long as the Hornblower family do us no harm.

DAWKER. I swear that too.

MRS H. I engage for my husband.

HORNBLOWER. Where are those two fellows?

DAWKER. Gone. It's no business of theirs.

HORNBLOWER. It's no business of any of ye what has happened to a woman in the past. Ye know that. Good-day!

He gives them a deadly look, and goes out, Left, followed by DAWKER.

MRS H. [*With her hand on the Deed*] Safe!

HILLCRIST *enters at the French window, followed by* JILL.

[*Holding up the Deed*] Look! He's just gone! I told you it was only necessary to use the threat. He caved in and signed this; we are sworn to say nothing. We've beaten him.

HILLCRIST *studies the Deed.*

JILL. [*Awed*] We saw Chloe in the car. How did she take it, mother?

MRS H. Denied, then broke down when she saw our witnesses. I'm glad you were not here, Jack.

JILL. [*Suddenly*] I shall go and see her.

MRS H. Jill, you will *not*; you don't know what she's done.

JILL. I shall. She must be in an awful state.

HILLCRIST. My dear, you can do her no good.

JILL. I think I can, Dodo.

MRS H. You don't understand human nature. We're enemies for life with those people. You're a little donkey if you think anything else.

JILL. I'm going, all the same.

MRS H. Jack, forbid her.

HILLCRIST. [*Lifting an eyebrow*] Jill, be reasonable.

JILL. Suppose I'd taken a knock like that, Dodo, I'd be glad of friendliness from someone.

MRS H. You never *could* take a knock like *that*.

JILL. You don't know what you can do till you try, mother.

HILLCRIST. Let her go, Amy. I'm sorry for that young woman.

MRS H. You'd be sorry for a man who picked your pocket, I believe.

HILLCRIST. I certainly should! Deuced little he'd get out of it, when I've paid for the Centry.

MRS H. [*Bitterly*] Much gratitude I get for saving you both our home!

JILL. [*Disarmed*] Oh! Mother, we *are* grateful Dodo, show your gratitude.

HILLCRIST. Well, my dear, it's an intense relief. I'm not good at showing my feelings, as you know. What d'you want me to do? Stand on one leg and crow?

JILL. *Yes*, Dodo, yes! Mother, hold him while I— [*Suddenly she stops, and all the fun goes out of her*] No! I can't!—I can't help thinking of *her*.

CURTAIN *falls for a Minute.*

SCENE II

Evening

When it rises again, the room is empty and dark, save for moonlight coming in through the French window, which is open.

The figure of Chloe, *in a black cloak, appears outside in the moonlight; she peers in, moves past, comes back, hesitatingly enters. The cloak, fallen back, reveals a white evening dress; and that magpie figure stands poised watchfully in the dim light, then flaps unhappily Left and Right, as if she could not keep still. Suddenly she stands listening.*

Rolf's Voice. [*Outside*] Chloe! Chloe! [*He appears*].

Chloe. [*Going to the window*] What are you doing here?

Rolf. What are *you*? I only followed you.

Chloe. Go away!

Rolf. What's the matter? Tell me!

Chloe. Go away, and don't say anything. Oh! The roses! [*She has put her nose into some roses in a bowl on a big stand close to the window*] Don't they smell lovely?

Rolf. What did Jill want this afternoon?

CHLOE. I'll tell you nothing. Go away!

ROLF. I don't like leaving you here in this state.

CHLOE. What state? I'm all right. Wait for me down in the drive, if you want to.

ROLF *starts to go, stops, looks at her, and does go.*

CHLOE, *with a little moaning sound, flutters again, magpie-like, up and down, then stands by the window listening. Voices are heard, Left. She darts out of the window and away to the Right, as* HILLCRIST *and* JILL *come in. They have turned up the electric light, and come down in front of the fireplace, where* HILLCRIST *sits in an armchair, and* JILL *on the arm of it. They are in undress evening attire.*

HILLCRIST. Now, tell me.

JILL. There isn't much, Dodo. I was in an awful funk for fear I should meet any of the others, and of course I did meet Rolf, but I told him some lie, and he took me to her room—boudoir, they call it—isn't boudoir a "dug-out" word?

HILLCRIST. [*Meditatively*] The sulking room. Well?

JILL. She was sitting like this. [*She buries her chin in her hands, with her elbows on her knees*] And she said in a sort of fierce way: "What do you want?" And I said: "I'm awfully sorry, but I thought you might like it."

HILLCRIST. Well?

JILL. She looked at me hard, and said: "I suppose you know all about it." And I said: "Only

vaguely," because of course I don't. And she said: "Well, it was decent of you to come." Dodo, she looks like a lost soul. What has she done?

HILLCRIST. She committed her real crime when she married young Hornblower without telling him. She came out of a certain world to do it.

JILL. Oh! [*Staring in front of her*] Is it very awful in that world, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. [*Uneasy*] I don't know, Jill. Some can stand it, I suppose; some can't. I don't know which sort she is.

JILL. One thing I'm sure of: she's awfully fond of Chearlie.

HILLCRIST. That's bad; that's very bad.

JILL. And she's frightened, horribly. I think she's desperate.

HILLCRIST. Women like that are pretty tough, Jill; don't judge her too much by your own feelings.

JILL. No; only— Oh! it was beastly; and of course I dried up.

HILLCRIST. [*Feelingly*] H'm! One always does. But perhaps it was as well; you'd have been blundering in a dark passage.

JILL. I just said: "Father and I feel awfully sorry; if there's anything we can do——"

HILLCRIST. That was risky, Jill.

JILL. [*Disconsolately*] I had to say something. I'm glad I went, anyway. I feel more human.

HILLCRIST. We *had* to fight for our home. I should have felt like a traitor if I hadn't.

JILL. I'm not *enjoying* home to-night, Dodo.

HILLCRIST. I never could hate properly; it's a confounded nuisance.

JILL. Mother's fearfully bucked, and Dawker's simply oozing triumph. I *don't* trust him, Dodo; he's too—not pugilistic—the other one with a pugnaceous.

HILLCRIST. He is rather.

JILL. I'm sure he wouldn't care tuppence if Chloe committed suicide.

HILLCRIST. [*Rising uneasily*] Nonsense! Nonsense!

JILL. I wonder if mother would.

HILLCRIST. [*Turning his face towards the window*] What's that? I thought I heard—[*Louder*] Is there anybody out there?

No answer. JILL *springs up and runs to the window.*

JILL. You! [*She dives through to the Right, and returns, holding* CHLOE'S *hand and drawing her forward*] Come in! It's only us! [*To* HILLCRIST] Dodo!

HILLCRIST. [*Flustered, but making a show of courtesy*] Good evening! Won't you sit down?

JILL. Sit down; you're all shaky.

She makes CHLOE *sit down in the armchair, out of which they have risen, then locks the door, and closing the windows, draws the curtains hastily over them.*

HILLCRIST. [*Awkward and expectant*] Can I do anything for you?

CHLOE. I couldn't bear it—he's coming to ask you——

HILLCRIST. Who ?

CHLOE. My husband. [*She draws in her breath with a long shudder, then seems to seize her courage in her hands*] I've got to be quick. He keeps on asking—he knows there's something.

HILLCRIST. Make your mind easy. We shan't tell him.

CHLOE. [*Appealing*] Oh ! that's not enough. Can't you tell him something to put him back to thinking it's all right ? I've done him such a wrong. I didn't realise till after—I thought meeting him was just a piece of wonderful good luck, after what I'd been through. I'm not such a bad lot—not really.

She stops from the over-quivering of her lips.

JILL, *standing beside the chair, strokes her shoulder.* HILLCRIST *stands very still, painfully biting at a finger.*

You see, my father went bankrupt, and I was in a shop till——

HILLCRIST. [*Soothingly, and to prevent disclosures*] Yes, yes ; yes, yes !

CHLOE. I never gave a man away or did anything I was ashamed of—at least—I mean, I had to make my living in all sorts of ways, and then I met Charlie.

Again she stopped from the quivering of her lips.

JILL. It's all right.

CHLOE. He thought I was respectable, and that was such a relief, you can't think, so—so I let him.

JILL. Dodo ! It's awful !

HILLCRIST. It is!

CHLOE. And after I married him, you see, I fell in love. If I had before, perhaps I wouldn't have dared—only, I don't know—you never know, do you? When there's a straw going, you catch at it.

JILL. Of course you do.

CHLOE. And now, you see, I'm going to have a child.

JILL. [*Aghast*] Oh! *Are* you?

HILLCRIST. Good God!

CHLOE. [*Dully*] I've been on hot bricks all this month, ever since—that day here. I knew it was in the wind. What gets in the wind never gets out. [*She rises and throws out her arms*] Never! It just blows here and there, [*Desolately*] and then blows home. [*Her voice changes to resentment*] But I've paid for being a fool—'tisn't fun, that sort of life, I can tell you. I'm not ashamed and repentant, and all that. If it wasn't for him! I'm afraid he'll never forgive me; its' such a disgrace for him—and then, to have his child! Being fond of him, I feel it much worse than anything I ever felt, and that's saying a good bit. It is.

JILL. [*Energetically*] Look here! He simply mustn't find out.

CHLOE. That's it; but it's started, and he's bound to keep on because he knows there's something. A man isn't going to be satisfied when there's something he suspects about his wife. Charlie wouldn't—never. He's clever, and he's jealous; and he's coming here.

She stops, and looks round wildly, listening.

JILL. Dodo, what can we say to put him clean off the scent ?

HILLCRIST. Anything in reason.

CHLOE. [*Catching at this straw*] You will ! You see, I don't know what I'll do. I've got soft, being looked after—he does love me. And if he throws me off, I'll go under—that's all.

HILLCRIST. Have you any suggestion ?

CHLOE. [*Eagerly*] The only thing is to tell him something positive, something he'll believe, that's not *too* bad—like my having been a lady clerk with those people who came here, and having been dismissed on suspicion of taking money. I could get him to believe that wasn't true.

JILL. Yes ; and it isn't—that's splendid ! You'd be able to put such conviction into it. Don't you think so, Dodo ?

HILLCRIST. Anything I can. I'm deeply sorry.

CHLOE. Thank you. And don't say I've been here, will you ? He's very suspicious. You see, he knows that his father has re-sold that land to you ; that's what he can't make out—that, and my coming here this morning ; he knows something's being kept from him ; and he noticed that man with Dawker yesterday. And my maid's been spying on me. It's in the air. He puts two and two together. But I've told him there's nothing he need worry about ; nothing that's true.

HILLCRIST. What a coil !

CHLOE. I'm very honest and careful about money.

So he won't believe that about me, and the old man wants to keep it from Charlie, I know.

HILLCRIST. That does seem the best way out.

CHLOE. [*With a touch of defiance*] I'm a true wife to him.

JILL. Of course we know that.

HILLCRIST. It's all unspeakably sad. Deception's horribly against the grain—but——

CHLOE. [*Eagerly*] When I deceived him, I'd have deceived God Himself—I was so desperate. You've never been right down in the mud. You can't understand what I've been through.

HILLCRIST. Yes, yes. I daresay I'd have done the same. I should be the last to judge——

CHLOE *covers her eyes with her hands.*

There, there! Cheer up!

He puts his hand on her arm.

JILL. [*To herself*] Darling Dodo!

CHLOE. [*Starting*] There's somebody at the door. I must go; I must go.

She runs to the window and slips through the curtains.

The handle of the door is again turned.

JILL. [*Dismayed*] Oh! It's locked—I forgot.

She springs to the door, unlocks and opens it, while HILLCRIST *goes to the bureau and sits down.*

It's all right, Fellows; I was only saying something rather important.

FELLOWS. [*Coming in a step or two and closing the door behind him*] Certainly, Miss. Mr Charles 'Orn-

blower is in the hall. Wants to see you, sir, or Mrs Hillcrist.

JILL. What a bore! Can you see him, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Er—yes. I suppose so. Show him in here, Fellows.

As FELLOWS *goes out,* JILL *runs to the window, but has no time to do more than adjust the curtains and spring over to stand by her father, before* CHARLES *comes in. Though in evening clothes, he is white and dishevelled for so spruce a young man.*

CHARLES. Is my wife here?

HILLCRIST. No, sir.

CHARLES. Has she been?

HILLCRIST. This morning, I believe, Jill?

JILL. Yes, she came this morning.

CHARLES. [*Staring at her*] I know that—*now,* I mean?

JILL. No.

HILLCRIST *shakes his head.*

CHARLES. Tell me what was said this morning.

HILLCRIST. I was not here this morning.

CHARLES. Don't try to put me off. I know too much. [*To* JILL] You.

JILL. Shall I, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. No; I will. Won't you sit down?

CHARLES. No. Go on.

HILLCRIST. [*Moistening his lips*] It appears, Mr Hornblower, that my agent, Mr Dawker——

CHARLES, *who is breathing hard, utters a sound of anger.*

—that my agent happens to know a firm, who in old days employed your wife. I should greatly prefer not to say any more, especially as we don't believe the story.

JILL. No; we don't.

CHARLES. Go on!

HILLCRIST. [*Getting up*] Come! If I were you, I should refuse to listen to anything against my wife.

CHARLES. Go on, I tell you.

HILLCRIST. You insist? Well, they say there was some question about the accounts, and your wife left them under a cloud. As I told you, we don't believe it.

CHARLES. [*Passionately*] Liars!

He makes a rush for the door.

HILLCRIST. [*Starting*] What did you say?

JILL. [*Catching his arm*] Dodo! [*Sotto voce*] We are, you know.

CHARLES. [*Turning back to them*] Why do you tell me that lie? When I've just had the truth out of that little scoundrel! My wife's been here; she put you up to it.

The face of CHLOE *is seen transfixed between the curtains, parted by her hands.*

She—she put you up to it. Liar that she is—a living lie. For three years a living lie!

HILLCRIST, *whose face alone is turned towards the curtains, sees that listening face. His hand goes up from uncontrollable emotion.*

And hasn't now the pluck to tell me. I've done with her. I won't own a child by such a woman.

With a little sighing sound CHLOE *drops the curtain and vanishes.*

HILLCRIST. For God's sake, man, think of what you're saying. She's in great distress.

CHARLES. And what am I ?

JILL. She loves you, you know.

CHARLES. Pretty love ! That scoundrel Dawker told me—told me— Horrible ! Horrible !

HILLCRIST. I deeply regret that our quarrel should have brought this about.

CHARLES. [*With intense bitterness*] Yes, you've smashed my life.

Unseen by them, MRS HILLCRIST *has entered and stands by the door, Left.*

MRS H. Would you have wished to live on in ignorance ?

They all turn to look at her.

CHARLES. [*With a writhing movement*] I don't know. But—*you*—*you* did it.

MRS H. You shouldn't have attacked us.

CHARLES. What did we do to you—compared with this ?

MRS H. All you could.

HILLCRIST. Enough, enough ! What can we do to help you ?

CHARLES. Tell me where my wife is.

JILL *draws the curtains apart—the window is open—*JILL *looks out. They wait in silence.*

JILL. We don't know.

CHARLES. Then she *was* here ?

HILLCRIST. Yes, sir ; and she heard you.

CHARLES. All the better if she did. She knows how I feel.

HILLCRIST. Brace up ; be gentle with her.

CHARLES. Gentle ? A woman who—who——

HILLCRIST. A most unhappy creature. Come !

CHARLES. Damn your sympathy !

He goes out into the moonlight, passing away Left.

JILL. Dodo, we ought to look for her ; I'm awfully afraid.

HILLCRIST. I saw her there—listening. With child ! Who knows where things end when they once begin ? To the gravel pit, Jill ; I'll go to the pond. No, we'll go together.

They go out.

MRS HILLCRIST *comes down to the fireplace, rings the bell and stands there, thinking.* FELLOWS *enters.*

MRS H. I want someone to go down to Mr Dawker's.

FELLOWS. Mr Dawker is here, ma'am, waitin' to see you.

MRS H. Ask him to come in. Oh ! and Fellows, you can tell the Jackmans that they can go back to their cottage.

FELLOWS. Very good, ma'am.

He goes out.

MRS HILLCRIST *searches at the bureau, finds and takes out the deed.* DAWKER *comes in ; he has the appearance of a man whose temper has been badly ruffled.*

MRS H. Charles Hornblower—how did it happen?

DAWKER. He came to me. I said I knew nothing. He wouldn't take it; went for me, abused me up hill and down dale; said he knew everything, and then he began to threaten me. Well, I lost my temper, and I told him.

MRS H. That's very serious, Dawker, after our promise. My husband is most upset.

DAWKER. [*Sullenly*] It's not my fault, ma'am; he shouldn't have threatened and goaded me on. Besides, it's got out that there's a scandal; common talk in the village—not the facts, but quite enough to cook their goose here. They'll have to go. Better have done with it, anyway, than have enemies at your door.

MRS H. Perhaps; but— Oh! Dawker, take charge of this. [*She hands him the deed*] These people are desperate—and—I'm not sure of my husband when his feelings are worked on.

The sound of a car stopping.

DAWKER. [*At the window, looking to the Left*] Hornblower's, I think. Yes, he's getting out.

MRS H. [*Bracing herself*] You'd better wait, then.

DAWKER. He mustn't give me any of his sauce; I've had enough.

The door is opened and HORNBLOWER *enters, pressing so on the heels of* FELLOWS *that the announcement of his name is lost.*

HORNBLOWER. Give me that deed! Ye got it out of me by false pretences and treachery. Ye swore

that nothing should be heard of this. Why! me own servants know!

MRS H. That has nothing to do with us. Your son came and wrenched the knowledge out of Mr Dawker by abuse and threats; that is all. You will kindly behave yourself here, or I shall ask that you be shown out.

HORNBLOWER. Give me that deed, I say! [*He suddenly turns on* DAWKER] Ye little ruffian, I see it in your pocket.

The end indeed is projecting from DAWKER'S *breast pocket.*

DAWKER. [*Seeing red*] Now, look 'ere, 'Ornblower, I stood a deal from your son, and I'll stand no more.

HORNBLOWER. [*To* MRS HILLCRIST] I'll ruin your place yet! [*To* DAWKER] Ye give me that deed, or I'll throttle ye.

He closes on DAWKER, *and makes a snatch at the deed.* DAWKER *springs at him, and the two stand swaying, trying for a grip at each other's throats.* MRS HILLCRIST *tries to cross and reach the bell, but is shut off by their swaying struggle.*

Suddenly ROLF *appears in the window, looks wildly at the struggle, and seizes* DAWKER'S *hands, which have reached* HORNBLOWER'S *throat.* JILL, *who is following, rushes up to him and clutches his arm.*

JILL. Rolf! All of you! Stop! Look!

DAWKER'S *hand relaxes, and he is swung round.* HORNBLOWER *staggers and re-*

covers himself, gasping for breath. All turn to the window, outside which in the moonlight HILLCRIST *and* CHARLES HORNBLOWER *have* CHLOE'S *motionless body in their arms.*

In the gravel pit. She's just breathing; that's all.

MRS H. Bring her in. The brandy, Jill!

HORNBLOWER. No. Take her to the car. Stand back, young woman! I want no help from any of ye. Rolf—Chearlie—take her up.

They lift and bear her away, Left. JILL *follows.*

Hillcrist, ye've got me beaten and disgraced hereabouts, ye've destroyed my son's married life, and ye've killed my grandchild. I'm not staying in this cursed spot, but if ever I can do you or yours a hurt, I will.

DAWKER. [*Muttering*] That's right. Squeal and threaten. You began it.

HILLCRIST. Dawker, have the goodness! Hornblower, in the presence of what may be death, with all my heart I'm sorry.

HORNBLOWER. Ye hypocrite!

He passes them with a certain dignity, and goes out at the window, following to his car.

HILLCRIST, *who has stood for a moment stock-still, goes slowly forward and sits in his swivel chair.*

MRS H. Dawker, please tell Fellows to telephone to Dr Robinson to go round to the Hornblowers *at once.*

DAWKER, *fingering the deed, and with a noise that sounds like* "The cur!" *goes out, Left.*

[*At the fireplace*] Jack! Do you blame me?

HILLCRIST. [*Motionless*] No.

MRS H. Or Dawker? He's done his best.

HILLCRIST. No.

MRS H. [*Approaching*] What is it?,

HILLCRIST. Hypocrite!

JILL *comes running in at the window.*

JILL. Dodo, she's moved; she's spoken. It may not be so bad.

HILLCRIST. Thank God for that!

FELLOWS *enters, Left.*

FELLOWS. The Jackmans, ma'am.

HILLCRIST. Who? What's this?

The JACKMANS *have entered, standing close to the door.*

MRS J. We're so glad we can go back, sir—ma'am, we just wanted to thank you.

There is a silence. They see that they are not welcome.

Thank you kindly, sir. Good-night, ma'am.

They shuffle out.

HILLCRIST. I'd forgotten their existence. [*He gets up*] What is it that gets loose when you begin a fight, and makes you what you think you're not? What blinding evil! Begin as you may, it ends in this—skin game! Skin game!

JILL. [*Rushing to him*] It's not you, Dodo; it's not you, beloved Dodo.

HILLCRIST. It is me. For I am, or should be, master in this house!

MRS H. I don't understand.

HILLCRIST. When we began this fight, we had clean hands—are they clean now? What's gentility worth if it can't stand fire?

CURTAIN

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Galsworthy, John

The Skin game.

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